

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY.

God did anoint thee with his odorous oil
 To wrestle, not to reign; and he assigns
 All thy tears over like pure crystallines
 For younger fellow-workers of the soil
 To wear for amulets.

E. B. BROWNING

No more brilliant party ever assembled for Christmas festivities in Northern Vermont than that which met on such an occasion, very early in this century, at the home of a young lawyer in the beautiful little village of Sheldon, since widely renowned for the efficacy of its healing waters.

The host and hostess were from families who came among the first settlers to Vermont. The company was gathered from all parts of the new and sparsely settled state, with a sprinkling of students who were completing their legal course at the famous law-school of Judge Reeves, in Litchfield, Conn.—of which their host was a graduate—and of young ladies and gentlemen from different places in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Several of these young ladies were passing the winter with acquaintances in Sheldon, and the whole country from the "Province Line" (and even beyond it) to St. Alban's was made merry with a succession of gay parties, sleigh-rides, dinners, suppers, and dances given in their honor. Even the sequestered hamlets of Richford and Montgomery, nestled among their own green hills, did not escape the general hilarity, but were startled from their quiet decorum, and resounded with a merriment which awakened unwonted echoes in their peaceful valleys.

Among the guests at this Christmas festival was a young lady of Ver-

mont, Miss Fanny A——, whose fair form rises before us as we write from the dim mists of childhood's earliest memories—a vision of gentle dignity and youthful loveliness which time has no power to efface.

Though some years younger than the lady of the house, she was her very dear and intimate friend, and was now passing a few weeks with her. Her queenly manners, the silver ripple of her low, sweet voice in the flow of a conversation which held her listeners spell-bound, as it were, by its clear and impressive utterances, bore witness to her familiarity with the most refined circles of city and country society, and the high culture of her splendid intellect.

Other circumstances, as will be seen, combined with her personal charms at this time to make her the centre of interest and attraction wherever she appeared.

She was the youngest daughter of a Green Mountain hero whom Vermont most delights to honor. Her father died when she was too young to realize her loss. Some years later, her mother—from whom she inherited her remarkable beauty and graceful dignity—married a most amiable man, who was capable of appreciating the rich treasure she committed to his charge in the person of her young daughter. Every advantage the country offered was secured to develop and polish the gem of which he was inexpressibly proud, and over

which he watched with a solicitude as tender as her own father could have exercised.

At that time, the gay society in New England was strongly tinctured with the species of infidelity introduced and fostered by the writings of Thomas Paine and his disciples, among whom Fanny's father had been conspicuous. Her step-father was not of that school, but he detested the cant and Puritanism of the only religious people he had ever known—regarding them as pretensions of which even those who adopted them were often the unconscious dupes. He had never been drawn within reach of better influences, then exercised only by the Protestant Episcopal Church in Vermont, to rescue intelligent thinkers from the grasp of infidelity. He conducted the education of his gifted daughter, therefore, with the most scrupulous care to avoid entirely all considerations of religion in any form. When her active and earnest mind would peer beyond the veil he had so carefully drawn between its pursuits and the interests of eternity, and send her to startle him with some question touching those interests which he could only answer by evasive ridicule, or an emphatic request that she would refrain from troubling her head about such matters, she would retire to ponder within herself, even while striving to obey her earthly father, the higher obligations imposed by One in heaven. Light and wisdom from above soon illuminated the soul that surrendered itself a willing victim before the altar of eternal truth. She was led by a divine hand, through paths she knew not, to a temple of which she had scarcely heard, and, while still living among those to whom the Catholic religion was entirely unknown, entered its portals to find herself—scarcely less

to her own astonishment than to the amazement and horror of her devoted parents—a Catholic, as firmly established and steadfastly resolved as if she had been born and educated in the faith!

The grief and indignation of her parents knew no bounds. They looked upon it as a most disgraceful infatuation. Peremptorily imposing silence upon her in relation to the subject, they determined to suppress it, if possible, until every means had been used to divert her mind from the fatal delusion.

All the wiles and artifices of the gayest and most fashionable circles in various American cities to which she was taken, were exhausted in vain to captivate her youthful fancy and deliver her soul from its mysterious thralldom. In vain the ardent addresses of devoted admirers—who were destined in the near future to be the brightest ornaments the bench and bar of their state could boast—were laid at her feet. In vain were all those worldly allurements, generally so irresistible to the young, spread before her. Her soul turned steadfastly away from each bewitching enticement, to solace itself with thoughts of the humble sanctuary in Montreal, where the weary bird had found a place in which she might build her nest, even within the tabernacle of thy house, O Lord of hosts!

In the autumn preceding the Christmas festival of which I write, the rambles had returned from their fruitless wanderings. Fanny's parents, discouraged and discomfited, resolved at this crisis to enlist the zeal of a few very intimate friends in their cause, by disclosing to them the great and unaccountable calamity which had befallen their child.

Among those whom they earnestly entreated to aid them in efforts to extricate her from the grasp of the

great deceiver, was the lady with whom she was now passing the weeks of the early winter. A Connecticut Episcopalian of the High-Church stamp, she occupied what they playfully called a "half-way house," at which they hoped she would be able to persuade Fanny to stop. She invited several gay young ladies to meet and enliven Fanny's visit, but took the greatest pains to conceal from them the religious tendencies of her beautiful guest. She entered with great zeal upon every scheme for winter pastimes, in the hope of diverting the mind of her young friend from its absorbing theme. In their private conversations, she exhausted every argument to convince Fanny that the Episcopal Church offered all the consolations for which her soul was yearning. In vain, in vain! She who had been called to drink from the fountain-head could not slake her thirst with draughts from scattered pools, which brought no refreshment to her fainting spirit. Vain also were the precautions used for concealment. Suspicions soon arose among her young companions that there was something wrong with Fanny. A rosary had been partially revealed as she drew her kerchief from her pocket. Worse still, a crucifix had been discovered under her pillow! Here were proofs of superstition indeed, of rank idolatry in unmistakable form, and no one knows to what unimaginable extent! Then it began to be whispered around the admiring and compassionate circle that she had not only taken the first step on the downward road, but was even now contemplating the still more fatal and final one of religious immolation!

It was their apprehension of this direful result which imparted a new and melancholy interest in their

eyes to all her words and actions. Though she maintained a modest reserve upon the subjects dearest to her heart, they thought they could discover some mysterious connection with these in every expression she uttered.

On several occasions, the most adventurous of her companions endeavored to penetrate the silence that sealed her lips in regard to her religious convictions, by direct questions, and, when these failed, by ridicule of such "absurd superstitions"; but to no purpose. Her nearest approach to any satisfactory remark was in reply to one of these questions: "It is impossible to convey any clear idea to your mind, in its present state, concerning these matters. Your opinions are founded upon prejudice, and your prejudices are the result of your entire ignorance in relation to them. If you really desire to be better informed, you need, first of all, to pray with humility for light and guidance, and then seek for knowledge. If you do this with sincerity, you will surely be instructed, and 'know of the doctrine'; but, if you refuse to take this first step, all the teaching in the world will be of no avail. 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe though one should come to them from the dead.'"

She rebuked ridicule with such calm dignity that it was soon abandoned, one of her assailants, a very lively young lady, remarking one day: "It is astonishing to see how terribly in earnest Fanny is! She certainly believes in the Catholic religion with all her heart, though how a person with her extensive information and splendid talents can receive such absurdities is a puzzle to common sense!"

But her severe trials were in her home. Her parents were unutterably grieved when she persisted in accepting the Catholic faith. This further determination to forsake those who had so fondly loved and tenderly cherished her, and who were so justly proud of the use she had made of the opportunities for improvement which their solicitude had secured for her, was beyond all human endurance.

If she had been the victim of adversity or of disappointed hopes, there might have been some excuse; but that the idol of doting parents should abandon her elegant home to the desolation in which her departure would enshroud it, and turn from all the advantages that wealth, position, and the homage of society could offer—dashing to the ground on the very threshold of life the brilliant prospects which were opening before her—was worse than madness! They complained bitterly to her of her ingratitude and heartless disregard of their feelings and wishes; poured unmeasured and contemptuous reproaches upon her for stifling the modest womanly instincts of her refined and delicate nature, to strike out boldly upon a new road hitherto untrodden by any woman of New England. Remonstrances, pleading, reproaches, and contempt were alike unavailing. Listening only to the persuasions of that "invisible Lover" whose voice had called her to relinquish the seductive charms which surrounded her worldly course, she turned away from them steadfastly to follow him and carry his cross up the steep and thorny paths of penance and self-abnegation, offering herself entirely to him on the Calvary made glorious to her by his precious blood.

Not "immediately," however, like those whom he called of old, did

she "leave the ship and her father, to follow him." Weary years of waiting and yearning, far from the tabernacles where her soul had chosen its home, did she accord in tender regard for the feelings of those, so truly and deeply beloved, who could not give her up, and who had no clue by which to trace the course her spirit was taking, or power even to conjecture the motives that actuated her.

When at length the time arrived to which they had consented to limit her stay with them, who shall describe the pangs that rent her heart in a parting so full of grief; in severing these nearest and dearest ties, and in witnessing the anguish which overwhelmed those around whom her tenderest earthly affections were entwined?

Alone, but full of peace, "leaning on the arm of her Beloved," did she tread the painful path. Her parents could not accompany her to witness the sacrifice which prostrated their fondest hopes, nor could they ever bring themselves to visit her in the sanctuary she had chosen.

Her Sheldon friend did so repeatedly, and was amazed to find her radiant with a joy which her countenance had never before revealed—happy in the peaceful home that offered only poverty and an unceasing round of labors in the service of the sick and suffering, with a happiness which the splendors of her worldly one could never impart.

Multitudes of New England people visiting Montreal flocked to the convent, begging to see the lovely young nun of the Hôtel Dieu, who was the first daughter New England had given to the sacred enclosure, and whom they claimed as belonging especially to them through her connection with their favorite Revolutionary hero.

So continual were these interruptions that she was driven at length to obtain the permission of the mother-superior absolutely to decline appearing in answer to such calls, except when they were made by the friends of former days, for whom she still preserved and cherished the liveliest affection.

By a singular coincidence—or rather, let us say, through tender memories of the gentle nun long since departed from the Hôtel Dieu, and the prevailing efficacy of her prayers—a large proportion of those who were present at the Christmas party at Sheldon, including the mistress of the feast and many of her family, were, from time to time as years flew by, received into the bosom of the Holy Catholic Church.

And so does our gracious and mighty Mother, “ever ancient, ever new,” win her triumphs, one by one, perpetually through all the ages—wins them often in the face, nay, even perforce, of circumstances apparently the most directly opposed to her influence; accomplishes them by means so weak and simple as would seem, according to all human reasoning, utterly inadequate. In countries far remote from her gentle influence, one is called—we hardly know how or why—in this place, another in that, as if the words of our divine Lord found their fulfilment even in this: “Two shall be in the field: one shall be taken, and one shall be left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill: one shall be taken, and one shall be left.”

And every soul thus called to launch its eternal interests upon the ocean of infinite truth must encounter much the same appalling trials, be haunted by the same startling

doubts and dark forebodings. Over the sunken rocks of heresy and unbelief along this coast the billows break with a force that affrights the stoutest heart, and many a would-be voyager shrinks back dismayed before their power; but once pluck up heart of grace to pass the foaming barrier, in the mid-ocean all is “peace and joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”

We cannot more fitly conclude this little sketch of a real event than by a quotation from Montalembert's closing chapter on the “Anglo-Saxon Nuns”:

“Is this a dream, the page of a romance? Is it only history—the history of a past for ever ended? No; once more it is what we behold and what happens amongst us every day. . . . Who, then, is this invisible Lover, dead upon a cross eighteen hundred years ago, who thus attracts to him youth, beauty, and love?—who appears to them clothed with a glory and a charm which they cannot withstand?—who seizes on the living flesh of our flesh, and drains the purest blood of our blood? Is it a man? No; it is God. There lies the secret, there the key of this sublime and sad mystery. God alone could win such victories and deserve such sacrifices. Jesus, whose godhead is amongst us daily insulted or denied, proves it daily, with a thousand other proofs, by those miracles of self-denial and self-devotion which are called vocations. Young and innocent hearts give themselves to him, to reward him for the gift he has given us of himself; and this sacrifice by which we are crucified is but the answer of human love to the love of that God who was crucified for us.”

AN ENGLISH CHRISTMAS STORY.

I.

THE winter wind is howling over the bleak moor, and Christmas is ushered in with a sore famine that has already made many a hearth desolate. The stout-hearted folk of Yorkshire have borne it well up to this, but the recurrence of the especial festival of good cheer makes their lot seem harder in December than it did two months before. On these Northern moors are scattered many Catholics, whose family traditions point to unknown martyrs as their ancestors, and whose honest pride in their forefathers is as strong as that of the descendants of the cavalier families. But though there may be famine and wretchedness on the moor, there is a worse squalor in the town. There no helping hand comes from the "Hall," bearing relief and consolation; the hovels and tall, crazy tenements are full to the brim of unknown human misery; and, for the poor, Christmas this year means little less than starvation. Those were not the days of subscription-lists, benefit societies, soup-kitchens, and clothing-clubs; spiritual and temporal relief were both scarcer than they are now, and the wars of the previous twenty years had made people button their pockets tight and repeat the axiom that "charity begins at home."

Through the manufacturing town of Weston, on a chill Christmas eve in the early part of this century, walked a thoughtful, almost middle-aged man, wrapped in a rich furred cloak, and preceded by a youth bearing a lantern. He had first left the town-hall, where he had assisted at

a political meeting, and heard a few pompous speeches hung upon the scantiest may-pole of facts. While these worthies had been declaiming, thought he, how many poor men, out of employment, uncared for by their pastors, must have been murmuring or swearing at their ill-luck and the apathy of their superiors! How many might be driven to crime or suicide by their wretched circumstances! He had heard that the Dissenters helped their poor rather more effectually than the "church" people did; and, luckily, in a manufacturing population there were always plenty of Dissenters! The Catholics, too, about whose "emancipation" there had been so much said lately in the Whig meetings, were generally a charitable set, and there were more of them in the North than anywhere else in the kingdom; but they were mostly country people, and the great houses had enough to do to support their own village poor. Could not something be done on a generous scale by the talkative municipality of the town? Should he suggest something to that effect? But he was only a visitor and traveler, and had but little interest with the magnates of Weston. General knowledge there was none at that time; and it mattered nothing to the local authorities here that he had travelled in the East, was a professor of ancient history in a French university, and corresponded with half the *savants* of Europe. To the insular mind of a trading community, he was a mere nameless atom of humanity, whose doings only concerned

Weston as far as the paying of his reckoning at the inn, and his consumption of the most costly items that the scarcity of the times rendered a fair source of profit to the landlord.

As he was sunk in these half-derivative thoughts, he was suddenly accosted by a man, whose figure, as far as the light of the lantern revealed it, was the very reverse of a highwayman. He had a pistol, however, and held it threateningly to the gentleman's heart. In a hollow, unsteady voice he quickly asked:

"Sir, hand me your money; you know what I can do, if you refuse, and I see you are unarmed."

The man's manner contrasted strangely with his present occupation. He was no experienced robber, that was evident; and his eyes rolled from side to side like those of a hunted animal. Our friend, who called himself Prof. John Stamyn, very quietly replied:

"My good friend, you have come to the wrong man. You will have no great booty from me. I have only three guineas about me, which are not worth a scuffle; so much good may you do with them. But you are in a bad way."

The man did not answer or recriminate. Hanging his head and lowering his pistol (an useless weapon enough, since the trigger was broken off and the barrel was cracked), he took the money offered him, and moved quickly away. Mr. Stamyn stood looking thoughtfully after him, then he said to the youth:

"Mind, James, and watch that man carefully, that he may not be aware of you; but be careful to see him housed, and bring me word of everything." And shaking his head, as if in pity, he walked back alone to his hotel.

Meanwhile, the boy, proud of his

mission, cautiously started on his pursuit of the seeming robber. Many a time he had to darken his lantern with his cloak, or flatten himself against doors, as the man he pursued turned round, glancing fearfully behind, and then, mending his pace, hurried on again with unsteady footsteps. Once he paused before a large, brightly lighted shop. Loaves and cakes of all shapes were piled in the window; but behind the counter sat two resolute-looking men, whose expression, as they gazed on the hungry face outside, was certainly the reverse of encouraging. The poor wayfarer turned away with a sigh, and dived down a side street. Squalid little booths alternated with equally squalid dwelling-houses along the sides of the alley, and grim, fierce, animal faces gathered in evil-looking clusters round the doors. The poor wretch hastened on; apparently none knew him, as the boy, who followed him, noticed that no one paid any attention to him. At last he stopped at a baker's shop—a dirty place, very different from the respectable one he had looked into so wistfully before. The boy waited at a convenient distance, and, by skilfully shading his lantern, remained there unperceived. There was no light, save what came from the shop—a dull flare at best. After a few minutes, the man came out, carrying a large brown loaf of the cheapest kind that was then sold in Weston. He now entered another street, and turned various corners, so that it was like threading a labyrinth to follow him. The youth then saw him disappear in the doorway of a tall, dilapidated house. The door was open, and hung awry from one rusty hinge; a nauseous smell greeted the nostrils, and shrill, disagreeable voices were heard in some up-stairs roost. The man began to scale the rickety steps, one or two

of which were missing here and there, and made a break-neck gap for the undoing of careless climbers. Each landing-place seemed more disreputable than the last, until the fourth was reached. It required a good deal of ingenuity in Mr. Stamyn's messenger to creep unperceived up these dangerous ladders, never startling the man he followed, and, above all, never helping himself along by the tell-tale light, whose radiance might have betrayed him. At last the poor "robber" entered a room, bare of any apology for furniture, and unlighted, save by the frosty rays of the moon. The wind whistled through it, crevices in the wall there were plenty, and not one pane of glass in the grimy window was whole. The boy crouched outside, and listened. A crevice allowed him to see a woman and four children coiled up in a heap, trying to keep each other warm. The man threw the loaf on the floor, and a sort of gurgle rose to welcome him. Bursting into tears, he cried, in a voice half-defiant, half-choked with grief:

"There, eat your fill; that's the dearest loaf I ever bought. I have robbed a gentleman of three guineas; so let us husband them well, and let me have no more teasings; for sooner or later these doings must bring me to the gallows, and all to satisfy your clamors!"

Here the wife mingled her lamentations with his, and the hungry children set up a howl of sympathy, all the while eying the loaf impatiently. The poor woman, whimpering faintly, broke off four large portions, and distributed them among the starving little ones, reserving smaller pieces for herself and her wretched husband, who was leaning despairingly on the window-sill.

When hunger was a little appeased, the group sat together as before, try-

ing to keep each other warm by the contact of their frozen limbs, and drawing over their feet the few rags of clothing they possessed. At last the man broke out into sobs:

"God forgive me! wife, this cannot go on. This money weighs like lead in my pocket."

"Dear," said the woman timidly, "I heard a priest say once that a starving man might take a loaf out of a baker's shop to stay his hunger, and do no sin."

"Ay," said the man gloomily, "if the baker would let him take it. But he would have put me in jail if I'd done it. I'd as lief go to jail as not, if it wasn't for you here; but I thought that would not do, and I know a gentleman is less likely to make a fuss, and Jim's pistol did the business; but hang me if I'll do it again, if we do have to starve for it."

The listener outside took up his lantern. "So the man's a Catholic," he wondered. "I heard master say the Catholics helped each other; anyhow, I'll go home, and report about what I've seen."

Cautiously he got down the dangerous stairs, and looked well about him, that he might know the landmarks of the region again. He reached the inn about an hour after Mr. Stamyn, who was sitting in his room, waiting anxiously for him. He told his tale, not forgetting to make much of his own dexterity in following the poor "robber." His master listened attentively, then gave orders to the boy to call him at six the next morning, when he would follow him to the man's dwelling. The morning was clear, frosty, and bright. The dawn was just breaking, and, if the town could look peaceful at any time, it did then. On the way, or, rather, in the immediate neighborhood of the poor man's abode, Mr.

Stamyn stopped to inquire what the man was who lived in such a chamber with a wife and four children. He was told that he was a shoemaker, a very good kind of a man, very industrious, and a neat workman ; but being burdened with a family, and the times being so bad, he had fallen out of work, and had a hard struggle to live.

The two then climbed the stairs, which were hardly safer in the morning's uncertain light than they had seemed in the dark the night before, and stopped before the shoemaker's door.

They knocked, and the crazy door was opened by the unfortunate man himself. He no sooner perceived who his visitor was, than he dreaded to learn the motive of the visit, which must surely be the speedy punishment of last night's robbery. He threw himself at the feet of Mr. Stamyn, saying in a broken voice :

"O sir ! indeed it was the first time, as it will be the last, that ever I touch what does not belong to me ; but I was drove to it by my poor children here. Two days had they been without bread, sir, and they cried that pitiful I couldn't stand it no longer. I was ashamed to beg, sir, and folk mostly say no to a story as looks so like a ready-made one. Surely, sir, you won't go to punish me, . . . and these poor things dependin' on me ? I swear I'll die sooner than do such a thing again. It was against the grain I did it, sir ; indeed it was."

Mr. Stamyn had taken up the youngest child in his arms, and was hushing its cries.

"No, my poor fellow, it was not to reproach or punish you I came. I have not the least intention of doing you any harm. You have a good character among your neighbors ; but you must expect to be

quickly cut short in such freedoms as you took with me. Hold your hand ; here's thirty guineas for you to buy leather. Live close, and set your children a commendable example ; and to put you further out of temptation with such unbecoming doings, as you are a neat workman (they tell me) and I am not particularly hurried, make for me and this boy two pairs of shoes each, which he shall call upon you for."

The poor man, dumfounded and almost in tears, stood before his benefactor, gazing at him and at the shining coins in his own open hand. The wife cried softly to herself, and the children, growing accustomed to the stranger, began swarming about his legs. Mr. Stamyn's servant then laid down a good-sized basket, and took off the lid. The children rushed to this new attraction, and began diving into the recesses of the basket with their poor, skinny little hands. The woman went up to Mr. Stamyn :

"Oh ! sir, we'll bless you to our dying day. And never fear ; my husband is a good workman, and he will work night and day with a will to make you the finest pair of shoes that ever was. . . . And, oh ! sir, the children shall pray for you, that God may reward what you've done for a poor, starving family. No ; my husband, he never stole before in his life, sir."

Here the husband, recovering his powers of speech, joined in, and rained blessings on his kind patron, who left the miserable place in a far more cheerful frame of mind than he had enjoyed at the great meeting last night. Just before he left Weston, the shoes were brought to him by the wife and her eldest child, who loaded him again with the most grateful blessings, and promised to pray that, if he were not a Catholic,

still God would "grant him grace to save his soul."

Mr. Stamyn smiled sadly, and bade his new friends good-by, having learnt their name, and promised in return never to forget it, should he happen to be in Weston again. Christmas had been a happy season with him this year; and though, by his present to the poor shoemaker, he had curtailed his own pleasure-jault, he felt that, after all, he had chosen the better part. . . .

II.

It was Christmas once more. Forty years had come and gone, and prosperity reigned in the North of England. A famine worse than that early one had swept over the land—a famine of work and cotton—but even the traces of that dire misfortune had gone now, and mills and factories were as busy as they could be.

In the neighboring county of Cumberland, in a retired little town, agricultural and pacific, stood a pretty, old-fashioned house, half-mansion, half-cottage. One side, with its dignified portal of granite, faced the street; but its garden, with bow-windows and porches jutting out among the flowers, almost leaned on the mountain. The family room looked into the snow-covered garden; the deep windows were embowered in ivy, bearing a fringe of tiny icicles, while inside wreaths of holly hung festooned over the dark curtains. Over the large and very high mantelpiece, where a fox's brush and head mingled with the branching antlers of the red deer, there hung a framed device, illuminated in mediæval letters: "Peace on earth to men of good will"; above the door was a large bunch of mistletoe.

The window was partly open, the huge fire warming the room quite

enough to allow of this; on the sill was scattered a feast of bread-crumbs steeped in milk, at which two or three robins were pecking industriously.

This was the mayor's house. He was an old man of seventy-five, universally respected for his incorruptible honesty and his steady, reliable character. He had been born in the town, but had left it while yet a baby in arms, had then returned a grown man and father of a family, gone into trade, become a successful business man, and seven years ago retired honorably into private life. Of his sons, one was a mill-owner near Manchester, one had succeeded to his father's local business and factory, and one, his youngest, had died at sea, leaving a little girl, his only child, to the care of its grandparents. The old man's only daughter was a nun in a Carmelite convent in the South of France.

No one but the mayor, his wife, and grandchild lived in this cosey house, and a very happy household it was. The girl had been partly brought up abroad, and had acquired many graceful foreign traits as a set-off to her English complexion and somewhat hoidenish manners. She was the apple of their eye to the old couple, who let her rule them and the house like a young empress. The mayor was nothing but a great baby in her hands, and people knew that the surest way to his heart or his purse was through that saucy little beauty, Philippa Mason. Strangers passing through the town used to marvel how it was that a Catholic had been elected mayor; but they were assailed by such a torrent of eulogies on "the best, most generous, most public-spirited, most conscientious of our citizens" that they were glad to take all for granted, and applaud the choice of the free-

men of Carthwaite without further explanation.

One other inmate of the mayor's house will be found worthy of notice—old Armstrong, or Uncle Jim, as he was mostly called. Verging upon sixty, he was still tall, slight, and erect in stature; his manners had some degree of refinement, and he was wont at times to hint mysteriously at his former connection with the gentlefolk of the land. Everybody liked him and laughed at him. He was the most good-humored and the most unlucky of mortals. He spoke loftily of the fortune he lost in his youth through cards and wine; and every one knew that when Mr. Mason, twenty years before, had kindly set him up in a small business of his own, he had not waited six months before he owned himself a bankrupt. Not a stain was on his character, but everything he touched seemed doomed. Money oozed through his fingers like water, while there was no visible cause for it; and the poorer he became, the merrier he was. At last, he had taken refuge with Mr. Mason, and become a part of his establishment. No one knew or inquired about his origin; people were glad enough to let the character of his patron vouch for the respectability of the harmless, amusing, kind-hearted old oddity.

As these four sat in the study (for so Philippa would have her favorite room called), they discussed their plans for the ensuing festival week.

"Uncle Jim has been invaluable," said the girl; "he has been my head-carpenter for the stage in the school, and has made such a grotto for the crib, and, above all, he has carved two wonderful alms-dishes for the collection to-morrow morning."

"Thank God! the church is to be opened to-morrow, wife," said the mayor, seeking his wife's hand. "I

may not live to see another Christmas nor hear another midnight Mass. In our young days, we little thought we should see such things—when priests would ride forty miles to a dying bed, booted and spurred, with pistols to fight the highwaymen. Why, even in town, it was as much as we could do to get to our duty at Easter every year."

"Grandpapa," said Philippa, "by next summer the spire will be finished, and we can have the banner of the cross floating there, as of old the city standard used to fly over the cathedrals."

"Child," answered Mr. Mason, "by next summer your bridal train may set the bells of the church a-ringing; and if I live to see that, I'll ask no more of Heaven."

"Nobody knows where to look for the bridegroom yet," said Philippa saucily.

"Hush!" put in the grandmother. "On the day when God gave his own Son to the world, and gave to your grandfather and me such a great blessing—years ago—no one must speak lightly of the gifts he may yet please to send or no." After a pause, Uncle Jim said hesitatingly:

"The good Lord certainly feeds the sparrows, as the Bible says, and I suppose that's why Miss Mason, *she* must feed the robins, just to follow the path we're told to; but it seems to me, if I'd waited for Him to feed *me* one day that I well remember, I'd have gone hungrier than you ever did, master, in the days of your trouble."

Philippa looked up with an expectant smile; she always anticipated fun when the old man adopted the mock-serious tone.

"Yes," continued the narrator, pleased to have at least the encouragement of an indulgent silence extended to him; "and I was prancing in

the best blue broadcloth and the most shining buttons you ever saw, and had on beautiful new boots that I never paid for . . .”

“You rascal!” softly said the mayor.

“And a hat with such a curly brim,” continued Jim imperturbably. “Well, it was in the summer, the only time I really *was* hungry—I don’t mean the summer, but that *that* occasion was the only one when I was nigh starving—and I and two friends, who had helped me to empty my purse, were at Bath. None of us had any money left; in fact, *they* never had of their own, but were of those whose tongue is their fortune; but hungry we all were, and must have something to eat. ‘I have it!’ I cried, for I was not a bad hand at imagination, ‘Follow me to the White Hart;’ and on the way I explained my plan. You will hear later what it was. Now, you will say, Mr. Mayor, that I had better have laid myself down by a haystack, and slept there on an empty stomach; and indeed, after a good supper, such as we had to-night, it would be easy enough for *me* to say so; but just then it wasn’t likely to be my opinion. So we walked into the hotel, as bold as kings, and ordered a private room and dinner for three—French soups and oyster patties, fish and game, and foreign sauces and ale, just as I knew it should be, and Madeira and champagne, of course. When we had done (and, in the intervals when the waiter had gone for the next course, we pocketed as much as our pockets would stand of anything that was solid), we called for the bill, and the waiter brought it, as pompous as you will, on a silver salver. I put my hand in my pocket, whereupon one of my friends, *he* says: ‘Come, come, I’ll stand this; it was I who proposed it and chose

the wines.’ And he puts his hand in his pocket. ‘Bless me!’ cries the other. ‘Gentlemen, I protest; it was I who ordered the dinner, and I request, as a favor, you let me pay; the cost is but a trifle.’ And *he* put his hand in his pocket. The waiter stood grinning and smirking, and thinking this great fun. ‘An idea strikes me,’ I then said. ‘Waiter, we’ll blindfold you and shut the door, and whoever you catch first will settle the bill.’ At this my friends clapped their hands, and the waiter, as proud as a peacock at the condescension of such fine young gentlemen, gives us a napkin to tie over his eyes, and lets us spin him round two or three times, that he may begin fair. ‘Now!’ I cried, and he began feeling about, afraid to upset the table; but he knew the room well, and went first to a closet beside the further door. While he made a noise opening it and feeling inside, I slid to another door, and gently pushed it ajar. In a twinkling we were all three walking leisurely out of the White Hart, looking like independent gentlemen, who did the host the great honor of approving of his cook! That afternoon, we drew lots which should sell his fine suit to pay travelling expenses, and it fell on me; so good-bye to my gay plumage, says I, and never dropt a tear, but got the money and played valet to the other two till we got to London, where I made them pay me what they owed through a lucky stroke at cards. And then we parted company, nothing loath on my side. So that is how I read the saying, ‘The Lord helps them as helps themselves.’”

Every one smiled at the privileged old man, though Philippa held up a warning forefinger and whispered: “Grandpapa told me once that you were not half so bad as you make

yourself out to be. Why did you not put on ladies' clothes, and go and beg for a dinner? They could not have said no to a pretty face, and it would have been better than stealing."

"Hark at that!" said Uncle Jim aloud. "You women are born to fool us. If I had my life to begin again, I should take advantage of that suggestion. The truth was, high society ruined me; and here I am, a destitute waif without a home. It is the first chapter of the Prodigal Son; but I shall never get into the second."

He looked with comical gravity at Mr. Mason, whose glance of affectionate amusement perfectly satisfied him in return; and then the old man, drawing Philippa towards him, said gently to her:

"On your next birthday, as you know, child, you will become entitled to all my fortune, and with this present will enter, too, into great responsibilities. Now, to give you an idea of what wealth is, what it can do, and how grave a trust it is, I will tell you a story too, but more humbly than good Uncle Jim, because my fault was more reckless, and because God has been more merciful to me in making it bring forth real good. Your father and your uncles were all little things then, and do not remember it, except very dimly; and since that Christmas, forty years ago, I have never repeated the tale."

And in simple, forcible language the Mayor of Carthwaite told his grandchild the story of the distress in Weston in the year 18—, the famine and the wretchedness, the temptations of starving men, and finally the incident in which Mr. Stamyn and the poor shoemaker had figured side by side forty years ago. "And your grandmother and I have prayed for that good man every night without ever missing," added the old man, "and taught your father to do

so; you yourself, child, have prayed for the kind friend, whose conversion to the true faith was our greatest wish. But his name and what his kindness was I never told a soul till now."

Philippa was silent. Uncle Jim hid his face, and sobbed. The old couple clasped hands by the fireside and looked into each other's faces as they remembered the bare attic where they had shivered and starved, and been nearly driven to become criminals by the sheer force of hunger. Nearly two generations had passed, and they were still together, thanking God that he had put it into the heart of man to relieve his fellow-man that night, when a life of crime and disgrace had so nearly begun to drag them down to the level of a "jail-bird." Philippa crept up to them softly, and kissed them both.

"I understand your life and your charities so much better now," she said; "and when I have the same responsibility thrust upon me, believe me, I will do as you have done."

The bells began to chime, and the party bestirred themselves to go over to the chapel, where the midnight Mass was to be said for the last time. To-morrow the church was to be opened and dedicated to "Our Lady and S. Crispin," and the chapel was to become a school. Uncle Jim was Philippa's special escort, for the old couple would never separate.

"Did you know that story?" she whispered to him as they crossed the silent streets.

"Ay, but he told me never to speak of it till he gave me leave. He did not tell you who the lad was that spied upon him that night; it was poor Uncle Jim."

Philippa looked aghast.

"Yes," he went on, "and I left Mr. Stamyn some years after, and tried to live as a gentleman on my

earnings; but, as I told you in jest, a heap of rascals helped me to empty my purse, and it was soon drained of all. I remembered your grandfather, had taken a fancy to him in Weston, went back, and found him. He took me in, and was very good to me, useless as I was. I was always a shiftless fellow, and never could keep what money I got. So he thought it better just to keep me at home, and I tried to be useful, and could be, too, when there was no question of money; and so it has been for nigh a score of years. Here we are at the chapel. That's one thing I never saw—your religion; but then, Mr. Mason is the best man I ever saw, and he's a Catholic. Anyways, there's no other religion I like better."

And Uncle Jim went in and decorously assisted at the service, just as if it was quite familiar to him and he liked it. I suspect he did, as far as he understood it. What the Masons believed could not be very far wrong.

The next morning there was a grand ceremony at the new church, and an unlimited amount of beef and pudding distributed by tickets among the poorer inhabitants of Carthwaite. After service, a carriage drove up to Mr. Mason's door.

A very old gentleman, followed by a much younger one, stepped out, and inquired for the mayor. They were shown into the study, where all the Masons—cousins, uncles, etc.—had now assembled. The servant announced "Mr. Stamyn."

Uncle Jim, recovering the instincts of his youth, suddenly stood up respectfully before his former master, who, however, did not seem to have the slightest recollection of him.

Mr. Stamyn went up to Mrs. Mason. "My dear friends," he said, "you both told me not to forget

your name; it was five years ago that I returned to Weston, and I did not fail to make inquiries, but hardly hoping that I should find you. They told me you had left, and I was lucky enough to find a clue to your subsequent career. I need not say how happy I am to redeem my promise to visit you again; I should certainly have been 'so, had I found you still in smoky old Weston, but here doubly."

Every one, especially Philippa, was struck by the old-time courtesy, precise, formal, yet most cordial, with which Mr. Stamyn spoke; his young companion glanced admiringly at the girl, instinctively distinguishing her from the more buxom damsels assembled round the family hearth—her cousins of Manchester and Carthwaite. Mr. Mason asked his friend and patron to stay with them, and sit at his board as the chief Christmas guest; he gladly complied, and said laughingly that he had expected to be asked. It was not until after the family meal that Uncle Jim revealed himself to his former master. His awkward self-consciousness and hurried glances had amused Mr. Stamyn in secret all the time, though his own perfectly controlled manner had given no sign of surprise or amusement; but when Jim, mysteriously bending over Mr. Stamyn's chair, feelingly asked what had become of the boy James, the old gentleman's eyes began to twinkle with premonitory signal-fire.

"He left me a few years after our Weston adventure, and, I very much fear, went to the devil!" was the answer.

"No, sir; Mr. Stamyn," said Jim, shaking with excitement, "he went to Mason."

"James," said his master seriously, "you could not possibly have done better; I congratulate you."

Uncle Jim looked triumphantly at Philippa, who was talking to the young man, Mr. Stamyn's companion. By her next birthday she was married to him—he was Mr. Stamyn's great-nephew and heir—but the two old men did not live to see another Christmas. Mrs. Mason and Uncle Jim remain yet, and tell the story to the rising generation.

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GOD IS OUR AID.

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF '67.

IN the dim twilight of an October evening, a rich man prepared to leave the vast treasures accumulated by a fruitless life. Fruitless, I say, for though his increasing millions ranked him a merchant prince of the great metropolis, yet the gold had hardened and crusted and metallized his heart—fusing a subtle poison that destroyed the softer instincts of his nature. Therefore, instead of bearing upward a Godward soul on prayerful incense, those last pulses concentrated in one bitter feeling against the daughter whose faith had won from him the intense hate of his life. The owner of millions each year increased his avarice, bowing him low before the god of the nineteenth century, and inciting the struggle, the sacrifice, the sin, for place and station and gold, literally proving the poet-king's cry,* "*Quoniam omnes dii Gentium demonia!*" So, while the stormy gusts swept up the avenue, and the lowering sky increased the night, the old man gathered his failing strength for the last great effort. "Hold me, William, support me ere it is too late. Quick! give me the pen, I must sign while yet my hand has power." Then they put the pen in his trembling hand, his stalwart son supporting him, and all the fiercer passions played upon that cold face, and in those cruel eyes, as he wrote the signature disinheriting the child of the wife whose fair face looked in silent reproach from the portrait opposite. And William Stanfield folded the paper and locked it

in the *escritoire*, and old Thomas of the iron heart "slept the last sleep." But this Stanfield, he of the stern Puritan stock, had not always been thus. First, he married his wife as a mere boy of twenty—a gentle New England girl—who had left William to him; William, so staunch in his loyalty to the heritage left by the *Mayflower* stock. But Thomas laid his boyish love to rest within the quiet "God's-acre" of the village church, and then wandered to New York to build his fortune. Fate did not withhold her favors from this sturdy son, who met and conquered her; for he was determined to succeed, and did!

And strange to say that at this time human softness yet lived amid the dross and corruption of the world, for Thomas Stanfield was by no means indifferent to certain influences. So, one bright Christmas morning, he found himself in New Orleans, and, stranger still to relate, his partner, Mons. Crécy, persuaded him to listen to the magnificent service at — Church. The music was exquisitely appealing, thrilling the nobler attributes of man's better nature; and so this worldly materialist forgot to speculate or dream of gold for two long hours, and sat rapt, while his soul absorbed its divine inspiration. If there is a season when the hardness of humanity dissolves and merges into its spiritual essence, it is when music gently lifts it to its higher affinities, and brings it *en rapport* with God. And thus the man of gold listened to the soft soprano, and far beyond the latticed grating caught a glimpse of dark

* "For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils."

eyes that haunted him long after the anthem ended. And when Etienne Crécy asked him to dine at the "Grove," his plantation near the city, he accepted, scarcely realizing what he did till he found himself behind a pair of splendid bays, with New Orleans far in the distance.

The balmy, bright-skied South always brought a pleasant Christmas, for oranges hung golden on the trees that formed the grove leading to the house, and the sweet breath of the blossoms perfumed the air. This to the Northerner, accustomed to ice and snow at this season, was a most enjoyable contrast; and his stroll over the beautiful grounds afforded real pleasure. Then they rested on the broad piazza, or gallery, as it is called in Louisiana, and talked of business details, when suddenly Mons. Crécy discovered that his guest was strangely distraught, for a clear, soft voice was sounding, to an accompanying harp, and Mr. Stanfield recognized the same silver tones that had absorbed him during the morning service. "*Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram,*" fell earnest and tender on his ear—it was, it must be, the same, and he turned to M. Crécy. "It is my daughter Madelaine," said the old man; and at dinner he saw the same fawn-eyes that had first glanced from behind the grating in the old church. And those shy, sweet eyes found a place in the heart of the cold New Englander, and in the spring he bore her a bride to his beautiful home in New York.

Three years passed, and only the step-son shared their household. Some trouble attended the marriage, for the parish priest, Father Jean, at first refused to unite her with such an obstinate heretic. But the maiden loved this son of the Puritans, so either her gentle influence or his pertinacious perseverance overcame

the scruples of the good priest, and Thomas Stanfield finally triumphed, giving some vague promise in reference to the children. He fully intended evading the fulfilment of the promise, for soon after his marriage he acknowledged thus much to his wife, who, with tears in her dark eyes, said she would only pray for God's grace to change him. So, almost as a curse it seemed, for three years no child came to bless the marriage. True, the young wife was very dear to this stern husband, but the element which had strengthened his forefathers still waxed strong within him, and the self-asserting dogmatism heired from John Carver's band sounded in the stern words that answered his wife when, with quivering lips, she told him of his little daughter's advent. He kissed the pale young mother tenderly and lovingly, but even in that hour he did not restrain himself from replying, "She belongs to me!" and Madelaine understood too well what those words implied. So she only whispered, as her white face grew whiter, "*I will leave her to God.* May our Holy Mother care for her!"

Then the gentle soul departed with the cross upon her bosom, and those last words on her lips, and many, many years after Thomas Stanfield heard repeated in his dreams, "God shall help her."

And a judgment rested on the rich man's harvest, for this warm-hearted, earnest Southern wife was very dear to him. But the child grew in loveliness, and her impulsive nature felt the need of more than her cold father accorded. Firm as he had been in reference to the child, it seemed strange that he evinced so much indifference to her education, for though she had been baptized in his own church, and sent to Protestant schools, yet very little care was be-

stowed upon her religious instruction. When she grew old enough, she accompanied her father to church, and through the long sermons her weary little eyes would often close. She went merely from habit, because her father wished her with him, for there was nothing in the cold, formal ritual, if that bare service can be called a ritual, to attract or warm her heart; but it was part of her duty to go; and so she went. Thus her childhood passed, and so her girlhood opened. Children rarely exert the reasoning faculties, accepting with boundless trust what is proposed by their elders. Faith and confidence are largely developed, therefore a grave record is written of those intrusted with these young immortals. But when reason waked and the heart expanded, this warm loving nature asked for more than what was offered, and her soul felt starved, hungry for the food it found not. Thomas Stanfield was now devoted to his business, from nine in the morning, when his *coupe* drove him to his office, to six in the evening, when his key opened the massive door of his palace—his whole soul entered into the fascination, the strife for increasing millions. And at night, as he sat silent in his high carved chair, the closed eyes and set features told that the scheming still continued. Was it strange, then, that the young girl yearned for something more than her home offered? Well, one September evening, soon after their return from the country, the servant handed in a card, bearing the simple inscription, "Kenneth C. Arnaud." Then Mr. Stanfield, disturbed in the midst of some speculation, testified by a grunt his welcome to a distant relative of his wife. "This is Miss Stanfield, my daughter," he said, as he seemed to remember that another person occupied the room. The

stranger was a courtly, handsome gentleman, and started as his eyes rested on the young girl. "How like my cousin Madelaine," he said, "as I remember her in my childhood." For the first time the old man seemed to realize the resemblance, and turned to examine the fair girl who was his daughter. "Yes," he faintly assented, and the conversation dragged through a half-hour's duration, when Mr. Arnaud rose to go. But this was not his last visit, for he passed the winter in the city; and many evenings found him at Mr. Stanfield's house, where Madelaine sang to him the songs he loved best. Then a new life opened to the young girl, and her heart felt a strange happiness it had never known before.

The Advent season came—a time of joy and gladness in the churches that celebrate this season, but scarcely remembered or noticed in dissenting congregations; and on the first Sunday that Mr. Arnaud formed one of the family party, he proposed that Madelaine should accompany him to St. —'s church, as the music was always attractive there. Old Mr. Stanfield was half asleep, when the name of this Roman Catholic church startled him. "Only to listen to the music, papa!" she laughingly replied to his frown, and she went. The ritual was new to her, the service a strange mystery, but she patiently watched it all, listening to the exquisite bursts from the choir. Then sounded the "Alma" with its sweet cadence, and the heart of the young girl thrilled within her. She could not explain, but she felt a strange attraction that drew her against her will to this beautiful ritual. Then came the lovely benediction, and the devotion of the kneeling hundreds, the solemn censer's cloudlike offering, the elevation, and the echoing

bell, at which a hush swept like an angel's presence over the rapt thousands. It was all a lovely dream to this young enthusiast, and, closing her eyes, troops of seraphim and cherubim seemed prolonging the words—

*"Tantum ergo Sacramentum
Veneremur cernui."*

She returned to her home filled with a new life, and for the first time her soul felt its thralls. She was very quiet that night, and even her father remarked the change. Poor child! she had needed all that had been denied to her, and the starved spirit was just tasting of the food immortal. Is it not often thus in life, that a charm, a mere instinct, leads us to the path for which we have been vainly striving? Give me thine heart! was the cry of the Holy Mother to the footsore and weary, to all who sought consolation from that loving breast; and the listening angels caught the echo of that cry, and bore it up to the great Pontiff, who sends the Comforter to spread the white-winged dove on the troubled soul that calls for peace!

The spring came, after the long, cold winter, and Kenneth Arnaud asked the old man for his gentle daughter. But Mr. Stanfield had always regarded Madelaine as a mere child, and seemed shocked and angry at the request. He had forgotten that eighteen years had passed since his soft-eyed wife had whispered, "I leave her to God"—and now a Catholic had asked his child in marriage! He did not answer the young man for several weeks, not till the sweet eyes of his daughter had been dimmed with many tears, and her childish heart had felt, ay, painfully felt, the first great sorrow of her life.

"It seems strange that my faith should prove an objection, Mr. Stanfield, for not very many years have passed since you gave your own example."

The old man looked him steadily in the eyes, and replied:

"And the great unhappiness of that union was the education of the children that were to come. What say you of this?"

"That, your daughter shall determine."

"You can speak this with safety, Mr. Arnaud, for my daughter has proved a quick pupil."

"I can scarcely comprehend you, Mr. Stanfield, and, as a gentleman, will not understand the accusation implied."

"I do not accuse you of influencing my daughter, but her bias in favor of the Romish Church is a subject that cannot afford me happiness."

The conversation was serious, and very painful to both, and at last Mr. Stanfield closed the interview with this remark: "As my daughter's happiness is concerned, I cannot withhold my consent, but I wish you to clearly understand that, when she renounces the church of her forefathers, she also relinquishes all right to her father's estate."

A proud smile curled the young man's lips as he replied, "I feel privileged to claim her, even though the conditions were far more capable of inflicting unhappiness."

And so they were married, and the old man and his son William bowed before the golden calf, and worshipped it, offering their souls as homage at its shrine.

For the young wife, one brief year of happiness passed, and yet there was unrest even then within her soul, for she craved with hungry longing the new life which she feared to taste,

because the ties binding her to her father appealed to her heart, and she dreaded an anger which she knew would never forgive what he considered so fearful an error.

But one cold morning in the winter of '61, the telegraph bore to New York tidings of the secession of Louisiana, then the sons of the sunny South rallied to her standard, and for four long years a bloody war desolated that section. She, the young wife, had never given her thoughts to politics, nor did she understand why hate and bitterness waged with such deadly strife between the two portions of a country which she so dearly loved; but her husband decided for her, and, feeling that her life was only a part of his, she followed. And those were years fraught with agony—years that recorded suffering that aged more than time had power to accomplish; for over each battlefield brooded a great host of prayer—prayer born of love intensified, and of partings which would know only the meeting above; and the race schooled by those years grew, developed, lived, more than generations ordinarily experience in a whole lifetime.

Col. Arnaud won a soldier's reputation, and the autumn of '64 found him, with his fine regiment, encamped a few miles below the Confederate capital. Madelaine soon followed him to Richmond, bringing her little family, her boy Kenneth and a baby daughter. The winter was very trying to this delicate woman, for the city was crowded with refugees from all parts of the Confederacy; every square inch was occupied, and therefore comfortable accommodations were impossible to find. Then the depreciated currency rendered the price of necessities almost fabulous, so that barely to live required great sacrifice and control. But the cour-

ageous wife and devoted mother gathered her little ones, and contentedly dwelt in one small room, happy to welcome her husband whenever his brief furloughs allowed him to spend a day with her. But the great culmination approached, and the troops that wore the tattered gray were soon to furl the cross of stars that had proudly waved over many a gallant fight; and on one cold wintry morning she heard the newsboys shout "Extra! extra!" and soon Franklin Street was echoing with news of the fierce battle below Richmond. Madelaine had not seen her husband for almost four weeks, and her heart sank as she listened. "I will get a paper," she said, and, leaving her nurse with the children, she descended to the street to purchase one.

Poor young thing—she little realized how literally she had followed the Scriptures, for she had forsaken all things, and he, her brave husband, was all she had to cling to; and now—but she was too truly a woman for control, and she fainted when she read the cruel words that told of her husband's fate. A night of horror followed, and the roll of the ambulance in the early gray of the next morning startled her from her troubled sleep. They, those of his brigade, in their faded gray bore him to the small chamber where his young wife waited, and pale and ghastly she saw him laid upon the bed, where he was soon to sleep the long pulseless sleep. All that glory could render to sweeten the pain of dying was offered, for the journals rang with the grand charge he had led, and his deeds of daring were as household words in the crowded Confederate capital. But the great edict had gone forth, and the priest of his church came to offer the last consolations.

"My own true wife," and he summoned the bowed figure, the frail girl-woman who knelt beside him. The sweet eyes were dim with tears, and the voice was tremulous with passionate grief. His left arm drew her to him, for the right was crushed and powerless. "I am about to ask a brave act from you, my darling; do you think that you can please me?"

"Ask me anything, Kenneth, only stay with me. Oh! do not leave me yet," and burning tears blinded her.

"My ways are not thy ways, nor my thoughts thy thoughts': do you remember these words, my own wife? And then—only a little while, when we shall meet where the for evermore will indeed be eternal! But not of this did I wish to speak, Elaine, but"—and he hesitated—"if my faith could be taught to my little ones?"

She did not reply at first, but, with one gaze of devoted, earnest love, she turned, and kneeling by his side, with the weak precious hand clasped within her own, she repeated: "And receive, O Lord, thy servant into thy holy church, for which her heart hungers." And he answered, "Amen!"

But this was no sudden desire influenced by her devotion to her husband; for, six years before, when she had listened to the sweet vesper service, the latent life had awakened, and the slumber had seen sleep no more, but the message, "Wake to thy salvation!" electrified her soul, and her whole nature thrilled its amen there; since then she had been peculiarly situated, and shrank from provoking anger in her father, as she realized how very stern he could be when he felt himself aggrieved. But now her heart told her she must no longer hesitate, the great crisis asked for action, and she felt that all worldly considerations must be forgotten when her husband, and her own

heart also, called for a decision which shaped her life. So she was baptized by the holy father beside the bed where her husband lay dying; and the priest's voice was very tender as he welcomed this stricken daughter Christ had given to his fold.

Only a few days after, she laid her husband to rest beneath the poplars at "Holleywood," where many of his comrades were lying; and then came the gloomy, stormy March, and the sad April when the snowy flag was folded, and it was during this season that the widowed mother was received into her husband's church.

The war had closed, and we all remember the fearful wreck that followed when Madelaine Arnaud found herself battling with the grim wolf whose shadow darkened her door. Her husband's fortune was all gone, and the delicate, dependent woman felt that she had but little to hope for from her father; still she would not believe that he could entirely forsake her, even though she had become a member of the church his soul abhorred. So she wrote in her extremity and asked for advice. Many anxious days and nights passed, and no letter came; a fortnight intervened, when, one morning, she opened the envelope handed to her by the postman, and read:

"You have chosen your way in life, and, when you forsook your father's faith, he also separated from one who had joined herself to idols. I enclose all that you may ever claim from me.

"THOMAS STANFIELD."

She found enclosed the last note written by her mother, only a few hours before her death, and a silver crucifix, with the name "Madelaine Crécy, La.," inscribed on the back or flat side of the cross.

She was very young to be left so entirely alone, for she was not yet:

twenty-five, and two children depended on her for support. What could she do, and how must she act? In her agony, she cried, "Save me, O Father, for without thine aid I am lost!" Then the crucifix fell from her letter, and, clasping it, she drew her boy to her, and, kneeling, prayed: "Lord, thy enemies and mine have risen up against me: I therefore cast myself at thy feet to implore thy succor."

The soft eyes of the little one gazed into her own, and, nestling closer, he asked:

"What makes mamma so sad?"

There are seasons in life when suffering is too great for expression, when tears refuse relief, and the over-charged heart, paralyzed by pain, seems incapable of pulsation. Then even speech fails; and the poor, desolate woman only pressed her child closer, and appealed to her God for protection.

Thus days passed, and she seemed unable to act, for at the South all was poverty and desolation, while she dared not anticipate what awaited her in New York. But the few dollars were growing less, and her children required food, so she decided to try the great city, and thither with her faithful nurse she journeyed. Her mother's note gave her strength, and she often re-read the faint tracery on the faded paper.

"For, my darling child" (the note read), "should you ever wander into the dear fold of your mother's church, feel always that my blessing will rest upon you, and though I may not live to guard you, yet my prayer will be then as it is now for God to be with you."

"MADELAINE CRECY STANFIELD."

And though she did feel crushed and desolate on that stormy September evening which found her in the great

city, still a strength came to her which she had never known, and she felt that God would protect her. Through the crowd at the depot she wended her way, and thence in the midst of a pouring rain to a cheap boarding-house, where she passed the night. The next morning she met an old servant who had known her as a child, and, with tears streaming from the old eyes, she took her to a small but respectable house in the town-part of the city, where she rented two rooms, and commenced her new life. A touching sight it was to see her in her sad mourning dress, she so fair and fragile, yet feeling that three depended upon her exertions, she rose to the emergency, and determined to succeed, or die in the service. She had brought a letter to a priest of her church, and to him she applied. He was very kind, and promised to do all that he could, but at the same time told her that pupils were not easily obtained, and recommended her to watch the newspapers. And she did search the journals, devoting herself to answering advertisements, but, save a few questionable replies, nothing came of this attempt. Meantime she began to feel the pinchings of want, and ventured to try sewing, but how was she to obtain work? "Go yourself, my dear young mistress," said the good old negress—"go yourself; and may the kind Lord bless you!" And, shrinking and nervous, she applied to a merchant down-town. She could scarcely find words for her request, but her pale face appealed, and she bore away her parcel. Tireless were her continued efforts, and all through snow and ice she persevered in her work. "God will help her!" the dying mother had said, and through the darkness of her life's storm she tried to comfort herself with this assurance.

It was very hard to realize that her father accumulated useless thousands and lived in princely style at the other end of the city, while, only because she believed in her mother's faith, she must suffer and toil with her little ones, needing comfort, and often even bread. Then the old man died, and, ere he died, the scene with which this story opens shamed his last hours.

But the exposure of three winters told on this delicate woman, and, when she felt her strength waning, all the horrors of starvation frightened her, for she knew that there were none to help her. She had moved still lower down-town, and into a smaller room, and there, with her faithful nurse, she endured life. But then there came a time when, though the will is strong to do, the physique fails to support, and the brave heart, struggling to conquer, feels despair stealing its vitals, and thus it was with Madelaine. The autumn of 1867 set in early, and November was cold and cruel to the poor. She, weaker than she had been, felt her slight unheeded cough increase, and, when December came, was too ill for any exertion. Bitterly the winter opened, snow covered the city, the wind keen and merciless swept the island, and thus the Christmas week found her with the little ones dependent, and she utterly helpless. The last penny had been expended, and the children were wailing with hunger.

Kenneth had looked into her own tearful eyes, and whispered, "Darling mamma, I will pray to Our Lady, and she will ask God to help you." She only kissed her brave, trustful child, but had no strength for utterance. So, when the chill night wrapped the city and darkened the gloomy chamber, the child picked up his mother's rosary, and, throwing it

around his throat, held the crucifix in his infant hands, and, kneeling beside his mother's low, poor bed, pleaded that the blessed Virgin would be kind to his dear mamma; and then the sweet child went to sleep murmuring Our Lady's name.

The dawn was fast breaking over the city when the child kissed her, and said, "She has heard my prayer, mamma, for I dreamed that a beautiful angel like the picture in your prayer-book came to me, and said, 'God will help her!'—and does not that mean you, mamma?"

"I hope that our kind Father will help us, my darling; therefore we must try to deserve his help."

"Oh! he will help you, mamma, and I will help you, too."

The day wore away, the last slice had been divided, and there was literally nothing else in the house. Hunger, starvation, was before them, and God, only God, could help them.

The snow fell heavily, the wind blew, and even the elements seemed warring against her, for she had not even fuel to keep off the cold.

Two o'clock chimed from Trinity, and, turning, she missed Kenneth. He was now eight years old, and often went out alone, but, with an instinct plainer than words, her heart rose to warn her of danger.

Three, four, five o'clock came, but still the child did not return. The lamps glared in the dark streets, and the night seemed too cold for human life—when—crash! a shriek, and a pair of horses dashed madly down the streets, throwing the occupants of the coach senseless upon the sidewalk. A crowd soon gathered, and bore the crushed and suffering man into the gloomy room where the sick woman lay. Her room opened on the street, and so they laid him on the small bed where the nurse slept.

"Bring a light," sounded a gruff voice.

"Don't you see dat de poor chile has no light for herself? Stonishing de fools dat libs in dese parts!"

A kind voice asked, "Is there no money? Take this and buy a candle." The speaker was a shabbily-dressed man, but the whole aspect showed that he had known better days. He remained with the injured man, and while they go to find a light I leave them. . . .

The snow was falling in great white feathery flakes, covering the dark alleys and darker tenements with its soft downy covering, and the little ragged, barefooted gamins of the great city were shrieking and screaming with delight; but not to build mimic forts or to join the army of snow-ballers did our little wanderer pause. "Mamma shall have some money," he said, "and I will begin to work for it, so I will go to the streets where the fine houses are, and there the men will give me work." Only eight years old was this little soldier in the grand army, but his noble face was radiant with the workings of his soul, which no poverty could injure. His little clothes were patched and scanty, and his poor little frozen toes came through the holes in his worn shoes; but the eyes shone with a light that could not be dimmed, and the firmly-set lips told that he was quite determined to do his best on that afternoon. At first he shrank from the cutting wind that swept from the East River, but, with hands in his pockets and cap pulled down, he ran on till he came to Broadway. Crowded with the happy crowd of the vast metropolis, the great highway was gay with bright faces on this eve of the feast of joy. Windows bright with presents for the favored children of fortune, shops thronged by smiling mothers eager

to gratify their pampered darlings, and child-infant as he was, the little one paused to look at the pretty toys, but tears filled the large blue eyes, and he said, "Oh! I can't look at these things, for poor mamma is sick and wants food." At that moment, a gentleman passed, and the child went up and pulled his warm overcoat, "Will you give me some work, sir?" But the creature, a fashionable young fop in tights, shook him off, and passed on. Then came another, this time a respectable gray-haired worthy, and, running in front, the same appealing voice asked the same question. But the successful merchant, hurrying home, was intent upon some new speculation, and, suddenly disturbed, was not very amiable, as he replied, "Be off, you little vagabond!"

This time the policeman came up, and taking him by the arm gruffly ordered him to move on. And thus, on the eve of this blessed festival when the great city joyed in each household, there was no grain for this wee waif, no crumb for the little stray, who was struggling against the power of the ebb which fate had sent to test his strength for the hereafter. On, on past the Fifth Avenue Hotel, through Madison Square, glancing at the glittering icicles or gleaming snow-drifts, shivering over the frozen pavements, on he travelled faintly trying for that which seemed for ever denied to him.

"*I will find it for her,*" he said, "for the beautiful angel, our Holy Mother, told me that she should be taken care of. I see her now far up in the clouds." And up in the leaden sky, far beyond the pure, beautiful flakes, he gazed, half-hoping that the Mother of Christ would smile on him again. And did she not even then hover over the young boy-warrior? Did she not pray that he, too, might

be strengthened in this hard fight which his infant powers essayed? *Adjuvabit eam Deus!** the dying mother had prayed, and his promises would not fail. At last, far up the avenue, when the cold, shadowy twilight stole on the great city, he paused before a stately mansion. Curtains of silk and costly lace draped the windows, and liveried servants were sitting on the box of the handsome coach awaiting the master's coming. Then the heavy door of massive bronze opened, and the master slowly descended the broad steps.

"Oh! you will help me, won't you? Please give me some work, for I want to earn money for my mother!"

"Send that little beggar away," was the irritable rebuff, and the footman flung him aside, not heeding where he fell. The carriage rolled away, and no thought was given to the small human bundle, roughly hurled from the rich man's path. Then night darkened over the city, and the stars, God's eternal sentinels, guarded earth as they had done eighteen centuries before when they watched the birth of the incarnate God. And beneath the same shimmering light the boy-warrior lay, all worsted in the strife, as thousands had sunk before, and all unconscious of the cruel hearts that still pulsed on. The torn little cap had fallen off, and the fair golden curls shaded the pale, childish face, turned upward as if in appeal to the Blessed Mother he had seen in his dreams. Was she watching still, and did her kind eyes see the crucifix clutched in the poor cold hands—the crucifix with the dead Christ, whose birth the morrow would celebrate? But the soft feathery flakes fell steadily on, covering the sweet face of the little one. Ah! God of

infinite love and goodness, will the great army with the ranks of sin, and greed, and lust, prosper and thrive and live, while this young soldier, this infant of purest soul and lion heart, lies all unheeded, dying, the victim of cruelty and selfish forgetfulness?

But see—a policeman tramps near, and he comes with stalwart tread swinging his burly arms, and clapping his gigantic hands to keep the fingers from freezing, for verily death seems to breathe out in the stealthy, deadening cold. Bravely he glances with searching look up and down the broad avenue, then pauses suddenly by the side of the obstruction just without the pavement.

"God and his holy saints forsake me, if this same bundle ain't a child! Ugh! but it's an ugly night for this small specimen to be left here! But come, let's see, my little man," and he tried to move him. "St. Patrick save me! if I ain't afraid that he'll never feel again!" And he dropped the little arm he held, and the crucifix, falling, lay dark against the glittering snow. The sight of the cross at once touched the stout Irishman, and this sturdy six footed son of the Green Isle, this huge guardian of the great city, gathered the stray lamb to his bosom tenderly, pityingly, as its own mother, and bore it to the station-house. And, full of the warm impulse of his race, he chafed the poor little hands, and lingered by the pallet on which he lay, till great tears fell from eyes that had not seldom looked unmoved on the misery of the metropolis. He raised the child's crucifix to his lips, and though he hurriedly summoned a physician, he muttered, "Poor little lamb, if he does come back to life, it will only keep an angel longer from Our Lady's home!"

The man returned to his duty, and hours passed before he was relieved,

* "God shall help her."

but ere he returned to his own home, and the young wife waiting him, he went back to the station-house to look after "the pretty young one" who had died with the cross in his hand; for he fully expected to find him dead on his return.

"We have had hard work to bring him back, Murphy," said the doctor, as the man walked up to the child. "Only five minutes more, and the cold would have reached the little heart, which was losing all sensation. We have had a time of it, and he has just fallen asleep. These are what we found on him. The card was fastened to his worn jacket, and the crucifix has also a name engraved." And picking up the card from the table the policeman read, "Kenneth Arnaud, 312 East — Street." On the back of the silver cross was the name, "Madelaine Cr  cy, August 15, 18—."

"Poor little child!" said the policeman. "I'll take him home, for his house is near my own."

So he wrapped the sleeping child in an old blanket, and carried him through the storm. A light glimmered on the first-floor front room as he approached the house, and the man stepped in to inquire about his young charge. As he opened the rickety door, the wailing voice of a woman smote him with the agonizing pain it expressed. "The gentleman may remain," she said, "but for God's sake find my child. O sir! bring me back my child!" and her sobs and moans were heart-rending. The negress rocked to and fro with the little girl, trying to keep her warm and still her feeble cries for bread, chanting the while in dull monotone, a habit peculiar to her race, and which at this time increased the oppressive gloom of the place, not at all relieved by the flickering tallow-candle, nearly burned out—on the

small bed in the corner the wounded gentleman lay groaning in agony, and impatiently awaiting a messenger he had summoned—a sad eve truly that announced the blessed festival!

At this time the policeman tapped with his club, but receiving no answer, and not caring to wait in the cold, he once more opened the door. Standing mute on the threshold, for the scene at first deprived him of speech, then walking to the centre of the room, he asked, "Is the mother of Kenneth Arnaud here?" For I have found a child of that name, who wore a crucifix on which was engraved 'Madelaine Cr  cy.'"

With one wild scream the mother answered, "He is mine!" and, as she clasped him to her heart, the soft eyes unclosed, and the feeble little voice whispered, "Darling mamma. I asked them all for work that I might buy you bread, but—oh! my head hurts, for a wicked man flung me away from a gentleman who rode in his carriage. But, mamma, don't cry, for she—the one with the angels—will care for us. Oh! I have just seen her, and I waked to find your own eyes where hers had been. Dear mamma, keep me with you, away from the cruel man, and the ice, oh! the cold snow!" And his little frame shivered with the recollection.

"Madelaine Cr  cy!" the sick man muttered on his couch in the corner. And the policeman approached "Yes, sir, that was the name on the crucifix, and I thought the little fellow was dead when I picked him up in front of the millionaire's house on Fifth Avenue."

"My God! and it was my servant who cast him from me! Will you take a message to that house, my good man? Do not refuse me, for gold shall pay you well. I—I am that millionaire, and an avenging God has crushed me." With his un-

jured arm, he drew out a card from his pocket, and said, "Take this to my residence, and tell my house-keeper to come to me at once." Then, placing an eagle, his own valued pocket-piece, in the policeman's hands, he prayed him to hasten his errand.

But the mother's weak voice also called the kind Irishman. She had heard nothing of the conversation, for she was absorbed with her darling, who in broken words had told his little story.

"I have nothing to give you, sir," she said with tears streaming down her pale cheeks. "The rosary was my mother's, and besides this I have not even food for my children. But I will pray for you, and God will bless and reward you, sir; he will grant what I cannot give."

She clasped his rough hand, which her tears fell upon, and he hurriedly left the room, for his own eyes were very dim.

Many and varied are the phases which the great city presents to these her guardians, but in his fifteen years' experience none had touched him more than this.

He closed the door after him, and the solitary candle burned to its socket. It was now past midnight, and a long silence ensued, broken only by the snores of the negress, for the starved infant had cried itself to sleep. The bruised stranger forgot his own suffering as he contemplated the surrounding misery, and for some time the stillness was profound. At last he muttered, "Madelaine Cr  cy! Madelaine Cr  cy! can it be the same! Then God have mercy on my soul!"

"Who calls my mother's name?" asked the sick woman.

"I, your father's son, Madelaine Arnaud. I, your brother, who despoiled you, and sold his life for gold, but," and his voice trembled with

emotion—"but who will devote that life to you now, if you will allow it, to atone for the cold selfishness of the past."

"I should be no daughter of the church which you despise, William Stanfield, if I bore anger to my father's son. I teach my little children to pray, 'Forgive us, as we forgive those who sin against us,' therefore must my heart refuse all malice against God's creatures, else would my own prayers avail not."

He could not answer then, for he, the bigot, the scorner of that church which he had ridiculed, felt now the beauty of her teaching when, even in the midst of her sufferings, this desolate woman could forgive one who knew that he was responsible for so much that might have been alleviated.

"Elaine!"—ay, it was the first time that she had listened to her old name since the night when her brave husband had spoken his farewell, and the sound thrilled her with strange memories—"Elaine, your roof has sheltered me to-night, and saved from destruction one who claims as a proof of your forgiveness acceptance of the home which he will share with yourself and little ones."

And, ere she answered, the chimes of Trinity heralded the dawn of that thrice-blessed morning when the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good-will." And that message of the Incarnation brooded with its holy evangel on the troubled hearts within, as, when the Christmas sun shone over the snow-covered city, the carriage of the rich merchant bore its precious freight to his home, and light, and life, and joy succeeded the gloomy night. And she, when her prayer ascended on that night of shelter and rest, realized the fulfilment of her mother's benediction: "Adjuvabit eam Deus!"

THE WOLF-TOWER.

A BRETON' CHRISTMAS LEGEND.

I.

LONG ago in Brittany, under the government of St. Gildas the Wise, seventh abbot of Ruiz, there lived a young tenant of the abbey who was blind in the right eye and lame in the left leg. His name was Sylvestre Ker, and his mother, Josserande Ker, was the widow of Martin Ker, in his lifetime the keeper of the great door of the Convent of Ruiz.

The mother and son lived in a tower, the ruins of which are still seen at the foot of Mont Saint-Michel de la Trinité, in the grove of chestnut-trees that belongs to Jean Maréchal, the mayor's nephew. These ruins are now called the Wolf-Tower, and the Breton peasants shudder as they pass through the chestnut-grove; for at midnight around the Wolf-Tower, and close to the first circle of great stones erected by the Druids at Carnac, are seen the phantoms of a young man and a young girl—Pol Bihan and Matheline du Coat-Dor.

The young girl is of graceful figure, with long, floating hair, but without a face; and the young man is tall and robust, but the sleeves of his coat hang limp and empty, for he is without arms. Round and round the circle they pass in opposite directions, and, strange to tell, as the legend adds, they never meet, nor do they ever speak to each other.

Once a year, on Christmas night, instead of walking they run; and

VOL. XXVI.—29

all the Christians who cross the heath to go to the midnight Mass hear from afar the young girl cry: "Wolf Sylvestre Ker, give me back my beauty!" and the deep voice of the young man adds: "Wolf Sylvestre Ker, give me back my strength!"

II.

And this has lasted for thirteen hundred years; therefore you may well think there is a story connected with it.

When Martin Ker, the husband of Dame Josserande, died, their son Sylvestre was only seven years old. The widow was obliged to give up the guardianship of the great door to a man-at-arms, and retire to the tower, which was her inheritance; but little Sylvestre Ker had permission to follow the studies in the convent school. The boy showed natural ability, but he studied little, except in the class of chemistry, taught by an old monk named Thaël, who was said to have discovered the secret of making gold out of lead by adding to it a certain substance which no one but himself knew; for certainly, if the fact had been communicated, all the lead in the country would have been quickly turned into gold. As for Thaël himself, he had been careful not to profit by his secret, for Gildas the Wise had once said to him: "Thaël, Thaël, God does not wish you to change the work of his hands. Lead is lead, and gold is gold. There is enough gold, and not too much lead.

Leave God's works alone; if not, Satan will be your master."

Most assuredly such precepts would not be well received by modern industry; but St. Gildas knew what he said, and Thaël died of extreme old age before he had changed the least particle of lead into gold. This, however, was not from want of will, which was proved after his death, as the rumor spread about that Thaël did not altogether desert his laboratory, but at times returned to his beloved labors. Many a time in the lonely hours of the night the fishermen, in their barks, watched the glimmer of the light in his former cell; and Gildas the Wise, having been warned of the fact, arose one night before Lauds, and with quiet steps crossed the corridors, thinking to surprise his late brother, and perhaps ask of him some details of the other side of the dreaded door which separates life from death.

When he reached the cell he listened and heard Thaël's great bellows puffing and blowing, although no one had yet been appointed to succeed him. Gildas suddenly opened the door with his master-key, and saw before him little Sylvestre Ker actively employed in relighting Thaël's furnaces.

St. Gildas was not a man to give way to sudden wrath; he took the child by the ear, drew him outside, and said to him gently:

"Ker, my little Ker, I know what you are attempting and what tempts you to make the effort; but God does not wish it, nor I either, my little Ker."

"I do it," replied the boy, "because my dear mother is so poor."

"Your mother is what she is; she has what God gives her. Lead

is lead, and gold is gold. If you go against the will of God, Satan will be your master."

Little Ker returned to the tower crestfallen, and never again slipped into the cell of the dead Thaël; but when he was eighteen years old a modest inheritance was left him, and he bought materials for dissolving metals and distilling the juice of plants. He gave out that his aim was to learn the art of healing; for that great purpose he read great books which treated of medical science and many other things besides.

He was then a youth of fine appearance, with a noble, frank face, neither one-eyed nor lame, and led a retired life with his mother, who ardently loved her only son. No one visited them in the tower, except the laughing Matheline, the heiress of the tenant of Coat-Dor and god-daughter of Josserande; and Pol Bihan, son of the successor of Martin Ker as armed keeper of the great door.

Both Pol and Matheline often conversed together, and upon what subject, do you think? Always of Sylvestre Ker. Was it because they loved him? No. What Matheline loved most was her own fair self, and Pol Bihan's best friend was named Pol Bihan. Matheline passed long hours before her little mirror of polished steel, which faithfully reflected her laughing mouth, full of pearls; and Pol was proud of his great strength, for he was the best wrestler in the Carnac country. When they spoke of Sylvestre Ker it was to say: "What if some fine morning he should find the secret of the fairy-stone that is the mother of gold!"

And each one mentally added:

"I must continue to be friendly

with him, for if he becomes wealthy he will enrich me."

Josserande also knew that her beloved son sought after the fairy-stone, and even had mentioned it to Gildas the Wise, who shook his venerable head and said:

"What God wills will be. Be careful that your son wears a mask over his face when he seeks the cursed thing; for what escapes from the crucible is Satan's breath, and the breath of Satan causes blindness."

Josserande, meditating upon these words, went to kneel before the cross of St. Cado, which is in front of the seventh stone of Cæsar's camp—the one that a little child can move by touching it with his finger, but that twelve horses, harnessed to twelve oxen, cannot stir from its solid foundation. Thus prostrate, she prayed: "O Lord Jesus! thou who hast mercy for mothers on account of the Holy Virgin Mary, thy mother, watch well over my little Sylvestre, and take from his head this thought of making gold. Nevertheless, if it is thy will that he should be rich, thou art the master of all things, my sweet Saviour!"

And as she rose she murmured: "What a beautiful boy he would be with a cloak of fine cloth and a hood bordered with fur, if he only had means to buy them!"

III.

It came to pass that as all these young people, Pol Bihan, Matheline, and Sylvestre Ker, gained a year each time that twelve months rolled by, they reached the age to think of marriage; and Josserande one morning proceeded to the dwelling of the farmer of Coat-Dor to ask the hand of Matheline for her son, Sylvestre Ker; at which

proposal Matheline opened her rosy mouth so wide, to laugh the louder, that far back she showed two pearls which had never before been seen.

When her father asked her if the offer suited her she replied: "Yes, father and godmother, provided that Sylvestre Ker gives me a gown of cloth of silver embroidered with rubies, like that of the Lady of Lannelar, and that Pol Bihan may be our groomsman."

Pol, who was there, also laughed and said: "I will assuredly be groomsman to my friend Sylvestre Ker, if he consents to give me a velvet mantle striped with gold, like that of the castellan of Gâvre, the Lord of Carnac."

Whereupon Josserande returned to the tower and said to her son: "Ker, my darling, I advise you to choose another friend and another bride; for those two are not worthy of your love."

But the young man began to sigh and groan, and answered: "No friendship or love will I ever know, except for Pol, my dear comrade, and Matheline, your god-daughter, my beautiful play-fellow."

And Josserande having told him of the two new pearls that Matheline had shown in the back of her mouth, nothing would do but he must hurry to Coat-Dor to try and see them also.

On the road from the tower to the farm of Coat-Dor is the Point of Hinnic, where the grass is salt, which makes the cows and rams very fierce while they are grazing. As Sylvestre Ker walked down the path at the end of which is the Cross of St. Cado, he saw on the summit of the promontory Pol and Matheline strolling along, talking and laughing; so he thought:

"I need not go far to see Matheline's two pearls."

And, in fact, the girl's merry laughter could be heard below, for it always burst forth if Pol did but open his lips; when, lo and behold! a huge old ram which had been browsing on the salt grass tossed back his two horns, and, fuming at the nostrils, bleated as loud as the stags cry when chased, and rushed in the direction of Matheline's voice; for, as every one knows, the rams become furious if laughter is heard in their meadow.

He ran quickly, but Sylvestre Ker ran still faster, and arrived the first by the girl, so that he received the shock of the ram's butting while protecting her with his body. The injury was not very great, only his right eye was touched by the curved end of one of the horns when the ram raised his head, and thus Sylvestre Ker became one-eyed.

The ram, prevented from slaughtering Matheline, dashed after Pol Bihan, who fled; reached him just at the end of the cliff, and pushed him into the sea, that beat against the rocks fifty feet below.

Well content with his work, the ram walked off, and the story says he laughed behind his woolly beard. But Matheline wept bitterly and cried:

"Ker, my handsome Ker, save Bihan, your sweet friend, from death, and I pledge my faith I will be your wife without any condition."

At the same time, amid the roaring of the waves, was heard the imploring voice of Pol Bihan crying:

"Sylvestre, O Sylvestre Ker! my only friend, I cannot swim. Come quickly and save me from

dying without confession, and all you may ask of me you shall have, were it the dearest treasure of my heart."

Sylvestre Ker asked:

"Will you be my groomsman?"

And Bihan replied:

"Yes, yes, and I will give you a hundred crowns. And all that your mother may ask of me she shall have. But hasten, hasten, dear friend, or the waves will carry me off."

Sylvestre Ker's blood was pouring from the wound in his eye, and his sight was dimmed; but he was generous of heart, and boldly leaped from the top of the promontory. As he fell his left leg was jammed against a jutting rock and broke, so there he was, lame as well as one-eyed; nevertheless, he dragged Bihan to the shore and asked:

"When shall the wedding be?"

As Matheline hesitated in her answer—for Sylvestre's brave deeds were too recent to be forgotten—Pol Bihan came to her assistance and gaily cried:

"You must wait, Sylvestre, my saviour, until your leg and eye are healed."

"Still longer," added Matheline (and now Sylvestre Ker saw the two new pearls, for in her laughter she opened her mouth from ear to ear)—"still longer, as limping, one-eyed men are not to my taste—no, no!"

"But," cried Sylvestre Ker, "it is for your sakes that I am one-eyed and lame."

"That is true," said Bihan.

"That is true," also repeated Matheline; for she always spoke as he did.

"Ker, my friend Ker," resumed Bihan, "wait until to-morrow, and we will make you happy."

And off they went, Matheline and he, arm-in-arm, leaving Sylvestre

to go hobbling along to the tower, alone with his sad thoughts.

Would you believe it? Trudging wearily home, he consoled himself by thinking that he had seen two new pearls behind the smile. You may, perhaps, think you have never met such a fool. Undeceive yourself: it is the same with all the men, who only look for laughing girls with teeth like pearls.

But the sorrowful one was Josserrande, the widow, when she saw her son with only one eye and one sound leg.

"Where did all this happen?" she asked with tears.

And as Sylvestre Ker gently answered, "I have seen them, mother; they are very beautiful," Josserrande divined that he spoke of her god-daughter's two pearls, and cried:

"By all that is holy, he has also lost his mind!"

Then, seizing her staff, she went to the Abbey of Ruiz, to consult St. Gildas as to what could be done in this unfortunate case; and the wise man replied:

"You should not have spoken of the two pearls; your son would have remained at home. But now that the evil is done, nothing will happen to him contrary to God's holy will. At high tide the sea comes foaming over the sands, yet see how quietly it retires. What is Sylvestre Ker doing now?"

"He is lighting his furnaces," replied Josserrande.

The wise man paused to reflect, and after a little while said:

"In the first place, you must pray devoutly to the Lord our God, and afterward look well before you to know where to put your feet. The weak buy the strong, the unhappy the happy; did you know that, my good woman? Your son will persevere in search of the

fairy-stone that changes lead into gold, to pay for Pol's wicked friendship and for the pearls behind the dangerous smiles of that Matheline. Since God permits it, all is right. Yet see that your son is well protected against the smoke of his crucible, for it is the very breath of Satan; and make him promise to go to the midnight Mass."

For it was near the glorious Feast of Christmas.

IV.

Josserrande had no difficulty in making Sylvestre Ker promise to go to the midnight Mass, for he was a good Christian; and she bought for him an iron armor to put on when he worked around his crucibles, so as to preserve him from Satan's breath.

And it happened that, late and early, Pol Bihan now came to the tower, bringing with him the laughing Matheline; for it was rumored around that at last Sylvestre Ker would soon find the fairy-stone and become a wealthy man. It was not only two new pearls that Matheline showed at the corners of her rosy mouth, but a brilliant row, that shone, and chattered, and laughed, from her lips down to her throat; for Pol Bihan had said to her:

"Laugh as much as you can; for smiles attract fools, as the turning-mirror catches larks."

We have spoken of Matheline's lips, of her throat, and of her smile, but not of her heart; of that we can only say the place where it should have been was nearly empty; so she replied to Bihan:

"As much as you will. I can afford to laugh to be rich; and when the fool shall have given me all the

gold of the earth, all the pleasures of the world, I will be happy, happy. . . . I will have them all for myself, for myself alone, and I will enjoy them."

Pol Bihan clasped his hands in admiration, so lovely and wise was she for her age; but he thought: "I am wiser still than you, my beauty: we will share between us what the fool will give—one half for me, and the other also; the rest for you. Let the water run under the bridge."

The day before Christmas they came together to the tower—Matheline carrying a basket of chestnuts, Pol a large jug, full of sweet cider—to make merry with the god-mother. They roasted the chestnuts in the ashes, and heated the cider before the fire, adding to it fermented honey, wine, sprigs of rosemary, and marjoram leaves; and so delicious was the perfume of the beverage that even Dame Josserande longed for a taste.

On the way Pol had advised Matheline adroitly to question Sylvestre Ker, to know when he would at last find the fairy-stone. Sylvestre Ker neither ate chestnuts nor drank wine, so absorbed was he in the contemplation of Matheline's bewitching smiles; and she said to him:

"Tell me, my handsome, lame, and one-eyed bridegroom, will I soon be the wife of a wealthy man?"

Sylvestre Ker, whose eye shot forth a lurid flame, replied:

"You would have been as rich as you are beautiful to-morrow, without fail, if I had not promised my dear mother to accompany her to the midnight Mass to-night. The favorable hour falls just at the first stroke of Matins."

"To-day?"

"Between to-day and to-morrow."

"And can it not be put off?"

"Yes, it can be put off for seven years."

Dame Josserande heard nothing, as Pol was relating an interesting story, so as to distract her attention; but while talking he listened with all his ears.

Matheline laughed no longer, and thought:

"Seven years! Can I wait seven years?" Then she continued:

"Beautiful bridegroom, how do you know that the propitious moment falls precisely at the hour of Matins? Who told you so?"

"The stars," replied Sylvestre Ker. "At midnight Mars and Saturn will arrive in diametrical opposition; Venus will seek Vesta; Mercury will disappear in the sun; and the planet without a name, that the deceased Thaël divined by calculation, I saw last night, steering its unknown route through space to come in conjunction with Jupiter. Ah! if I only dared disobey my dear mother."

He was interrupted by a distant vibration of the bells of Plouharnel, which rang out the first signal of the midnight Mass. Josserande instantly left her wheel.

"It would be a sin to spin one thread more," said she. "Come, my son Sylvestre, put on your Sunday clothes, and let us be off for the parish church, if you please."

Sylvestre wished to rise, for never yet had he disobeyed his mother; but Matheline, seated at his side, detained him and murmured in silvery tones:

"My handsome friend, you have plenty of time."

Pol, on his side, said to Dame Josserande:

"Get your staff, neighbor, and

start at once, so as to take your time. Your god-daughter Matheline will accompany you; and I will follow with my friend Sylvestre, for fear some accident might happen to him with his lame leg and sightless eye."

As he proposed, so was it done; for Josserrande suspected nothing, knowing that her son had promised, and that he would not break his word. As they were leaving, Pol whispered to Matheline:

"Amuse the good woman well, for the fool must remain here."

And the girl replied:

"Try and see the caldron in which our fortune is cooking. You will tell me how it is done."

Off the two women started; a large, kind mother's heart, full of tender love, and a sparrow's little gizzard, narrow and dry, without enough room in it for one pure tear.

For a moment Sylvestre Ker stood on the threshold of the open door to watch them depart. On the gleaming white snow their two shadows fell; the one bent and already tottering, the other erect, flexible, and each step seemed a bound. The young lover sighed. Behind him Pol Bihan in a low voice said:

"Ker, my comrade, I know what you are thinking about, and you are right to think so; this must come to an end. She is as impatient as you are, for her love equals yours; for both of you it is too long to wait."

Sylvestre Ker turned pale with joy.

"Do you speak truth?" he stammered. "Am I fortunate enough to be loved by her?"

"Yes, on my faith!" replied Pol Bihan, "she loves you too well for her own peace. When a girl

laughs too much, it is to keep from weeping—that's the real truth."

v.

Well might they call him "the fool," poor Sylvestre Ker! Not that he had less brains than another man—on the contrary, he was now very learned—but love crazes him who places his affections on an unworthy object. Sylvestre Ker's little finger was worth two dozen Pol Bihans and fifty Mathelines; in spite of which Matheline and Pol Bihan were perfectly just in their contempt, for he who ascends the highest falls the lowest.

When Sylvestre had re-entered the tower Pol commenced to sigh heavily and said:

"What a pity! What a great, great pity!"

"What is a pity?" asked Sylvestre Ker.

"It is a pity to miss such a rare opportunity."

Sylvestre Ker exclaimed:

"What opportunity? So you were listening to my conversation with Matheline?"

"Why, yes," replied Pol. "I always have an ear open to hear what concerns you, my true friend. Seven years! Shall I tell you what I think? You would only have twelve months to wait to go with your mother to another Christmas Mass."

"I have promised," said Sylvestre.

"That is nothing; if your mother loves you truly, she will forgive you."

"If she loves me!" cried Sylvestre Ker. "Oh! yes, she loves me with her whole heart."

Some chestnuts still remained, and Bihan shelled one while he said:

"Certainly, certainly, mothers always love their children; but Matheline is not your mother. You are one-eyed, you are lame, and you have sold your little patrimony to buy your furnaces. Nothing remains of it. Where is the girl who can wait seven years? Nearly the half of her age! . . . If I were in your place I would not throw away my luck as you are about to do, but at the hour of Matins I would work for my happiness."

Sylvestre Ker was standing before the fireplace. He listened, his eyes bent down, with a frown upon his brow.

"You have spoken well," at last he said; "my dear mother will forgive me. I shall remain, and will work at the hour of Matins."

"You have decided for the best!" cried Bihan. "Rest easy; I will be with you in case of danger. Open the door of your laboratory. We will work together; I will cling to you like your shadow!"

Sylvestre Ker did not move, but looked fixedly upon the floor, and then, as if thinking aloud, murmured:

"It will be the first time that I have ever caused my dear mother sorrow!"

He opened a door, but not that of the laboratory, pushed Pol Bihan outside, and said:

"The danger is for myself alone; the gold will be for all. Go to the Christmas Mass in my place; say to Matheline that she will be rich, and to my dear mother that she shall have a happy old age, since she will live and die with her fortunate son."

VI.

When Sylvestre Ker was alone he listened to the noise of the

waves dashing upon the beach, and the sighing of the wind among the great oaks—two mournful sounds. And he looked at the empty seats of Matheline, the madness of his heart; and of his dear mother, Josserrande, the holy tenderness of all his life. Little by little had he seen the black hair of the widow become gray, then white, around her sunken temples. That night memory carried him back even to his cradle, over which had bent the sweet, noble face of her who had always spoken to him of God.

But whence came those golden ringlets that mingled with Josserrande's black hair, and which shone in the sunlight above his mother's snowy locks? and that laugh, ah! that silvery laugh of youth, which prevented Sylvestre Ker from hearing in his pious recollections the calm, grave voice of his mother. Whence did it come?

Seven years! Pol had said, "Where is the girl who can wait seven years?" and these words floated in the air. Never had the son of Martin Ker heard such strange voices amid the roaring of the ocean, nor in the rushing winds of the forest of the Druids.

Suddenly the tower also commenced to speak, not only through the cracks of the old windows when the mournful wind sighed, but with a confusion of sounds that resembled the busy whispering of a crowd, that penetrated through the closed doors of the laboratory, under which a bright light streamed.

Sylvestre Ker opened the door, fearing to see all in a blaze, but there was no fire; the light that had streamed under the door came from the round, red eye of his furnace, and happened to strike the stone of the threshold. No one

was in the laboratory; still the noises, similar to the chattering of an audience awaiting a promised spectacle, did not cease. The air was full of speaking things; the spirits could be felt swarming around, as closely packed as the wheat in the barn or the sand on the sea-shore.

And, although not seen, they spoke all kinds of phantom-words, which were heard right and left, before and behind, above and below, and which penetrated through the pores of the skin like quicksilver passing through a cloth. They said:

"The Magi have started, my friend."

"My friend, the Star shines in the East."

"My friend, my friend, the little King Jesus is born in the manger, upon the straw."

"Sylvestre Ker will surely go with the shepherds."

"Not at all; Sylvestre Ker will not go."

"Good Christian he was."

"Good Christian he is no longer."

"He has forgotten the name of Joseph, the chaste spouse."

"And the name of Mary, the ever Virgin Mother."

"No, no, no!"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"He will go!"

"He will not go!"

"He will go, since he promised Dame Jossierande."

"He will not go, since Matheline told him to stay."

"My friend, my friend, to-night Sylvestre Ker will find the golden secret."

"To-night, my friend, my friend, he will win the heart of the one he loves."

And the invisible spirits, thus

disputing, sported through the air, mounting, descending, whirling around like atoms of dust in a sun-beam, from the flag-stones of the floor to the rafters of the roof.

Inside the furnace, in the crucible, some other thing responded, but it could not be well heard, as the crucible had been hermetically sealed.

"Go out from here, you wicked crowd," said Sylvestre Ker, sweeping around with a broom of holly-branches. "What are you doing here? Go outside, cursed spirits, damned souls—go, go!"

From all the corners of the room came laughter; Matheline seemed everywhere.

Suddenly there was profound silence, and the wind from the sea brought the sound of the bells of Plouharnel, ringing the second peal for the midnight Mass.

"My friend, what are they saying?"

"They say Christmas, my friend—Christmas, Christmas, Christmas!"

"Not at all! They say, Gold, gold, gold!"

"You lie, my friend!"

"My friend, you lie!"

And the other voices, those that were grumbling in the interior of the furnace, swelled and puffed. The fire, that no person was blowing, kept up by itself, hot as the soul of a forge should be. The crucible became red, and the stones of the furnace were dyed a deep scarlet.

In vain did Sylvestre Ker sweep with his holly broom; between the branches, covered with sharp leaves, the spirits passed—nothing could catch them; and the heat was so great the boy was bathed in perspiration.

After the bells had finished their second peal he said: "I am stifling.

I will open the window to let out the heat as well as this herd of evil spirits."

But as soon as he opened the window the whole country commenced to laugh under its white mantle of snow—barren heath, ploughed land, Druid stones, even to the enormous oaks of the forest, with their glistening summits, that shook their frosty branches, saying: "Sylvestre Ker will go! Sylvestre Ker will not go!"

Not a spirit from within flew out, while all the outside spirits entered, muttering, chattering, laughing: "Yes, yes, yes, yes! No, no, no, no!" And I believe they fought.

At the same time the sound of a cavalcade advancing was heard on the flinty road that passed before the tower; and Sylvestre Ker recognized the long procession of the monks of Ruiz, led by the grand abbot, Gildas the Wise, arrayed in cope and mitre, with his crosier in his hand, going to the Mass of Plouharnel, as the convent-chapel was being rebuilt.

When the head of the cavalcade approached the tower the grand abbot cried out:

"My armed guards, sound your horns to awaken Dame Josserande's son!"

And instantly there was a blast from the horns, which rang out until Gildas the Wise exclaimed:

"Be silent, for there is my tenant wide awake at his window."

When all was still the grand abbot raised his crosier and said:

"My tenant, the first hour of Christmas approaches, the glorious Feast of the Nativity. Extinguish your furnaces and hasten to Mass, for you have barely time."

And on he passed, while those in the procession, as they saluted Ker, repeated:

"Sylvestre Ker, you have barely time; make haste!"

The voices of the air kept gibbering: "He will go! He will not go!" and the wind whistled in bitter sarcasm.

Sylvestre Ker closed his window. He sat down, his head clasped by his trembling hands. His heart was rent by two forces that dragged him, one to the right, the other to the left: his mother's prayer and Matheline's laughter.

He was no miser; he did not covet gold for the sake of gold, but that he might buy the row of pearls and smiles that hung from the lips of Matheline. . . .

"Christmas!" cried a voice in the air.

"Christmas, Christmas, Christmas!" repeated all the other voices.

Sylvestre Ker suddenly opened his eyes, and saw that the furnace was fiery red from top to bottom, and that the crucible was surrounded with rays so dazzling he could not even look at it. Something was boiling inside that sounded like the roaring of a tempest.

"Mother! O my dear mother!" cried the terrified man, "I am coming. I'll run. . . ."

But thousands of little voices stung his ears with the words:

"Too late, too late, too late! It is too late!"

Alas! alas! the wind from the sea brought the third peal of the bells of Plouharnel, and they also said to him: "Too late!"

VII

As the sound of the bells died away the last drop of water fell from the clepsydra and marked the hour of midnight. Then the furnace opened and showed the glowing crucible, which burst with

a terrible noise, and threw out a gigantic flame that reached the sky through the torn roof. Sylvestre Ker, enveloped by the fire, fell prostrate on the ground, suffocated in the burning smoke.

The silence of death followed. Suddenly an awful voice said to him: "Arise." And he arose.

On the spot where had stood the furnace, of which not a vestige remained, was standing a man, or rather a colossus; and Sylvestre Ker needed but a glance to recognize in him the demon. His body appeared to be of iron, red-hot and transparent; for in his veins could be seen the liquid gold, flowing into, and then in turn retreating from, his heart, black as an extinguished coal.

The creature, who was both fearful and beautiful to behold, extended his hand toward the side of the tower nearest the sea, and in the thick wall a large breach was made.

"Look," said Satan.

Sylvestre Ker obeyed. He saw, as though distance were annihilated, the interior of the humble church of Plouharnel where the faithful were assembled. The officiating priest had just ascended the altar, brilliant with the Christmas candles, and there was great pomp and splendor; for the many monks of Gildas the Wise were assisting the poor clergy of the parish.

In a corner, under the shadow of a column, knelt Dame Josserande in fervent prayer, but often did the dear woman turn toward the door to watch for the coming of her son.

Not far from her was Matheline du Coat-Dor, bravely attired and very beautiful, but lavishing the pearls of her smiles upon all who sought them, forgetting no one but

God; and close to Matheline Pol Bihan squared his broad shoulders.

Then, even as Satan had given to Sylvestre Ker's sight the power of piercing the walls, so did he permit him to look into the depth of hearts.

In his mother's heart he saw himself as in a mirror. It was full of him. Good Josserande prayed for him; she united Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the holy family, whose feast is Christmas, in the pious prayer which fell from her lips; and ever and ever said her heart to God: "My son, my son, my son!"

In the heart of Pol Sylvestre Ker saw pride of strength and gross cupidity; in the spot where should have been the heart of Matheline he saw Matheline, and nothing but Matheline, in adoration before Matheline.

"I have seen enough," said Sylvestre Ker.

"Then," replied Satan, "listen!"

And immediately the sacred music resounded in the ears of the young tenant of the tower, as plainly as though he were in the church of Plouharnel. They were singing the *Sanctus*: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts! The heavens and the earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"

Dame Josserande repeated the words with the others, but the refrain of her heart continued: "O Jesus, Infinite Goodness! may he be happy. Deliver him from all evil and from all sin. I have only him to love. . . . Holy, holy, holy, give me all the suffering, and keep for him all the happiness!"

Can you believe it? Even while piously inhaling the perfume of this celestial hymn the young tenant

wished to know what Matheline was saying to God. Everything speaks to God—the wild beasts in the forest, the birds in the air, even the plants, whose roots are in the ground.

But miserable girls who sell the pearls of their smiles are lower than the animals and vegetables. Nothing is beneath them, Pol Bihan excepted. Instead of speaking to God, Pol Bihan and Matheline whispered together, and Sylvestre Ker heard them as distinctly as if he had been between them.

"How much will the fool give me?" asked Matheline.

"The idiot will give you all," replied Pol.

"And must I really squint with that one-eyed creature, and limp with the lame wretch?"

Sylvestre Ker felt his heart die away within him.

Meanwhile, Josserrande prayed: "O ever Virgin Mother! pray for my dear child. As Jesus is your adorable heart, Sylvestre Ker is my poor heart. . . ."

"Never mind," continued Bihan, "it is worth while limping and squinting for a time to win all the money in the world."

"That is true; but for how long?"

Sylvestre Ker held his breath to hear the better.

"As long as you please," answered Pol Bihan.

There was a pause, after which the gay Matheline resumed in a lower tone:

"But . . . they say after a murder one can never laugh, and I wish to laugh always. . . ."

"Will I not be there?" replied Bihan. "Some time or other the idiot will certainly seek a quarrel with me, and I will crack his bones by only squeezing him in

my arms; you can count upon my strength."

"I have heard enough," said Sylvestre Ker to Satan.

"And do you still love this Bihan?"

"No, I despise him."

"And Matheline—do you love her yet?"

"Yes, oh! yes, . . . but . . . I hate her!"

"I see," said Satan, "that you are a coward and wicked like all men. Since you have heard and seen enough at a distance, listen, and look at your feet. . . ."

The wall closed with a loud crash of the stones as they came together, and Sylvestre Ker saw that he was surrounded by an enormous heap of gold-pieces, as high as his waist, which gently floated, singing the symphony of riches. All around him was gold, and through the gap in the roof the shower of gold fell and fell and fell.

"Am I the master of all this?" asked Sylvestre Ker.

"Yes," replied Satan; "you have compelled me, who am gold, to come forth from my caverns; you are therefore the master of gold, provided you purchase it at the price of your soul. You cannot have both God and gold. You must choose one or the other."

"I have chosen," said Sylvestre Ker. "I keep my soul."

"You have firmly decided?"

"Irrevocably."

"Once, twice, . . . reflect! You have just acknowledged that you still love the laughing Matheline."

"And that I hate her; . . . yes, . . . it is so, . . . but in eternity I wish to be with my dear mother Josserrande."

"Were there no mothers," growled Satan, "I could play my game much better in the world!"

And he added :

"For the third time, . . . adjudged!"

The heap of gold became as turbulent as the water of a cascade, and leaped and sang; the millions of little sonorous coins clashed against each other, then all was silent and they vanished. The room appeared as black as a place where there had been a great fire; nothing could be seen but the lurid gleam of Satan's iron body.

Then said Sylvestre Ker :

"Since all is ended, retire!"

VIII.

But the demon did not stir.

"Do you think, then," he asked, "that you have brought me hither for nothing? There is the law. You are not altogether my slave, since you have kept your soul; but as you have freely called me, and I have come, you are my vassal. I have a half-claim over you. The little children know that; I am astonished at your ignorance. . . . From midnight to three o'clock in the morning you belong to me, in the form of an animal, restless, roving, complaining, without help from God. This is what you owe to your strong friend and beautiful bride. Let us settle the affair before I depart. What animal do you wish to be—roaring lion, bellowing ox, bleating sheep, crowing cock? If you become a dog you can crouch at Matheline's feet, and Bihan can lead you by a leash to hunt in the woods. . . ."

"I wish," cried Sylvester Ker, whose anger burst forth at these words—"I wish to be a wolf, to devour them both!"

"So be it," said Satan; "wolf you shall be three hours of the night during your mortal life. . . . Leap, wolf!"

And the wolf Sylvestre Ker leaped, and with one dash shattered the casement of the window as he cleared it with a bound. Through the aperture in the roof Satan escaped, and, spreading a pair of immense wings, rapidly disappeared in an opposite direction from the steeple of Plouharnel, whose chimes were ringing at the Elevation.

IX.

I do not know if you have ever seen a Breton village come forth after the midnight Mass. It is a joyous sight, but a brief one, as all are in a hurry to return home, where the midnight meal awaits them—a frugal feast, but eaten with such cheerful hearts. The people, for a moment massed in the cemetery, exchange hospitable invitations, kind wishes, and friendly jokes; then divide into little caravans, which hurry along the roads, laughing, talking, singing. If it is a clear, cold night, the clicking of their wooden shoes may be heard for some time; but if it is damp weather the sound is stifled, and after a few moments the faint echo of an "adieu" or Christmas greeting is all that can be heard around the church as the beadle closes it.

In the midst of all this cheerfulness Josserande alone returned with a sad heart; for through the whole Mass she had in vain watched for her beloved son. She walked fifty paces behind the cavalcade of the monks of Ruiz, and dared not approach the Grand-Abbot Gildas, for fear of being questioned about her boy. On her right was Matheline du Coat-Dor, on her left Bihan—both eager to console her; for they thought that by that time Sylvestre Ker must have learned the wonderful

secret which would secure him untold wealth, and to possess the son they should cling to the mother; therefore there were promises and caresses, and "will you have this, or will you have that?"

"Dear godmother, I shall always be with you," said Matheline, "to comfort and rejoice your old age; for your son is my heart."

Pol Bihan continued:

"I will never marry, but always remain with my friend, Sylvestre Ker, whom I love more than myself. And nothing must worry you; if he is weak I am strong, and I will work for two."

To pretend that Dame Josserande paid much attention to all these words would be false; for her son possessed her whole soul, and she thought:

"This the first time he has ever disobeyed and deceived me. The demon of avarice has entered into him. Why does he want so much money? Can all the riches of the world pay for one of the tears that the ingratitude of a beloved son draws from his mother's eyes?"

Suddenly her thoughts were arrested, for the sound of a trumpet was heard in the still night.

"It is the convent-horn," said Matheline.

"And it sounds the wolf-alarm!" added Pol.

"What harm can the wolf do," asked Josserande, "to a well-mounted troop like the cavalry of Gildas the Wise? And, besides, cannot the holy abbot with a single word put to flight a hundred wolves?"

They had arrived at the heath of Carnac, where are the two thousand seven hundred and twenty-nine Druid stones, and the monks had already passed the round point where nothing grows, neither grass nor heath, and which

resembles an enormous caldron—a caldron wherein to make oaten porridge—or rather a race-course, to exercise horses.

On one side might be seen the town, dark and gloomy; on the other, as far as the eye could reach, rows of rugged obelisks, half-black, half-white, owing to the snow which threw into bold relief each jagged outline. Josserande, Matheline, and Pol Bihan had just turned from the sunken road which branches toward Plouharnel; and the moon played hide-and-go-seek behind a flock of little clouds that flitted over the sky like lambs.

Then a strange thing happened. The cavalcade of monks was seen to retreat from the entrance of the avenues to the middle of the circle, while the horn sounded the signal of distress, and loud cries were heard of "Wolf! wolf! wolf!"

At the same time could be distinguished the clashing of arms, the stamping of horses, and all the noise of a ferocious struggle, above which rose the majestic tones of Gildas the Wise, as he said with calmness:

"Wolf, wicked wolf, I forbid you to touch God's servants!"

But it seemed that the wicked wolf was in no hurry to obey, for the cavalcade plunged hither and thither, as though shaken by convulsion; and the moon having come forth from the clouds, there was seen an enormous beast struggling with the staffs of the monks, the halberds of the armed guard, the pitchforks and spears of the peasants, who had hastened from all directions at the trumpet-call from Ruiz.

The animal received many wounds, but it was fated not to die. Again and again it charged upon the crowd, rushed up and

down, round and round, biting, tearing with its great teeth so fearfully that a large circle was made around the grand abbot, who was finally left alone in face of the wolf.

For a wolf it was.

And the grand abbot having touched it with his crosier, the wolf crouched at his feet, panting, trembling, and bloody. Gildas the Wise bent over it, looked at it attentively, then said :

"Nothing happens contrary to God's holy will. Where is Dame Josserande?"

"I am here," replied a mournful voice full of tears, "and I dread a great misfortune."

She also was alone; for Matheline and Pol Bihan, seized with terror, had rushed across the fields at the first alarm and abandoned their precious charge. The grand abbot called Josserande and said :

"Woman, do not despair. Above you is the Infinite Goodness, who holds in his hands the heavens and the whole earth. Meanwhile, protect your wolf; we must return to the monastery to gain from sleep strength to serve the Lord our God!"

And he resumed his course, followed by his escort.

The wolf did not move; his tongue lay on the snow, which was reddened by his blood. Josserande knelt beside him and prayed fervently. For whom? For her beloved son. Did she already know that the wolf was Sylvestre Ker? Certainly; such a thing could scarcely be divined, but under what form cannot a mother discover her darling child?

She defended the wolf against the peasants, who had returned to strike him with their pitchforks and pikes, as they believed him

dead. The two last who came were Pol Bihan and Matheline. Pol Bihan kicked him on the head and said, "Take that, you fool!" and Matheline threw stones at him and cried : "Idiot, take that, and that, and that!"

They had hoped for all the gold in the world, and this dead beast could give them nothing more.

After a while two ragged beggars passed by and assisted Josserande in carrying the wolf into the tower. Where is charity most often found? Among the poor, who are the figures of Jesus Christ.

x.

Day dawned. A man slept in the bed of Sylvestre Ker, where widow Josserande had laid a wolf. The room still bore the marks of a fire, and snow fell through the hole in the roof. The young tenant's face was disfigured with blows, and his hair, stiffened with blood, hung in heavy locks. In his feverish sleep he talked, and the name that escaped his lips was Matheline's. At his bedside the mother watched and prayed.

When Sylvestre Ker awoke he wept, for the thought of his condemnation returned, but the remembrance of Pol and Matheline dried the tears in his burning eyes.

"It was for those two," said he, "that I forgot God and my mother. I still feel my friend's heel upon my forehead, and even to the bottom of my heart the shock of the stones thrown at me by my betrothed!"

"Dearest," murmured Josserande, "dearer to me than ever, I know nothing; tell me all."

Sylvestre Ker obeyed; and when he had finished Josserande kissed him, took up her staff, and proceed-

ed toward the convent of Ruiz to ask, according to her custom, aid and counsel from Gildas the Wise. On her way men, women, and children looked curiously at her, for throughout the country it was already known that she was the mother of a wolf. Even behind the hedge which enclosed the abbey orchard Matheline and Pol were hidden to see her pass; and she heard Pol say: "Will you come to-night to see the wolf run round?"

"Without fail," replied Matheline; and the sting of her laughter pierced Josserande like a poisonous thorn.

The grand abbot received her, surrounded by great books and dusty manuscripts. When she wished to explain her son's case he stopped her and said:

"Widow of Martin Ker, poor, good woman, since the beginning of the world Satan, the demon of gold and pride, has worked many such wickednesses. Do you remember the deceased brother, Thaël, who is a saint for having resisted the desire of making gold—he who had the power to do it?"

"Yes," answered Josserande; "and would to heaven my Sylvestre had imitated him!"

"Very well," replied Gildas the Wise, "instead of sleeping I passed the rest of the night with St. Thaël, seeking a means to save your son, Sylvestre Ker."

"And have you found it, father?"

The grand abbot neither answered yes nor no, but he began to turn over a very thick manuscript filled with pictures; and while turning the leaves he said: "Life springs from death, according to the divine word; death seizes the living according to the pagan law

of Rome; and it is nearly the same thing in the order of miserable temporal ambition, whose inheritance is a strength, a life, shot forth from a coffin. This is a book of the defunct Thaël's, which treats of the question of maladies caused by the breath of gold—a deadly poison. . . . Woman, would you have the courage to strike your wolf a blow on his head powerful enough to break the skull?"

At these words Josserande fell her full length upon the tiles, as if she had been stabbed to the heart; but in the very depth of her agony—for she thought herself dying—she replied:

"If you should order me to do it, I would."

"You have this great confidence in me, poor woman?" cried Gildas, much moved.

"You are a man of God," answered Josserande, "and I have faith in God."

Gildas the Wise prostrated himself on the ground and struck his breast, knowing that he had felt a movement of pride. Then, standing up, he raised Josserande, and kissed the hem of her robe, saying:

"Woman, I adore in you the most holy faith. Prepare your axe, and sharpen it!"

XI.

In Brittany, when this legend is repeated, the relater here adds a current proverb of the province: "Christians, there is nothing greater than Faith, that is the mother of Hope, and thus the grandmother of Holy Love, that carries one above to the Paradise of God."

In the days of Gildas the Wise intense silence always reigned at night through the dense oak forests of the Armorican country.

One of the most lonely places was Cæsar's camp, the name given to the huge masses of stone that encumbered the barren heath; and it was the common opinion that the pagan giants supposed to be buried under them rose from their graves at midnight, and roamed up and down the long avenues, watching for the late passers-by to twist their necks.

This night, however—the night after Christmas—many persons could be seen about eleven o'clock on the heath before the stones of Carnac, all around the Great Basin or circle, whose irregular outline was clearly visible by moonlight.

The enclosure was entirely empty. Outside no one was seen, it is true; but many could be heard gabbling in the shadow of the high rocks, under the shelter of the stumps of oaks, even in the tufts of thorny brambles; and all this assemblage watched for something, and that something was the wolf, Sylvestre Ker.

They had come from Plouharnel, and also from Lannelar, from Carnac, from Kercado, even from the old town of Crach, beyond La Trinité.

Who had brought together all these people, young and old, men and women? The legend does not say, but very probably Matheline had strewn around the cruel pearls of her laughter, and Pol Bihan had not been slow to relate what he had seen after the midnight Mass.

By some means or other the entire country around for five or six leagues knew that the son of Martin Ker, the tenant of the abbey, had become a man-wolf, and that he was doomed to expiate his crime in the spot haunted by the phantoms—the Great Basin of the

Pagans, between the tower and the Druid stones.

Many of the watchers had never seen a man-wolf, and there reigned in the crowd, scattered in invisible groups, a fever of curiosity, terror, and impatience; the minutes lengthened as they passed, and it seemed as though midnight, stopped on the way, would never come.

There were at that time no clocks in the neighborhood to mark the hour, but the matin-bell of the convent of Ruiz gave notice that the wished-for moment had arrived.

While waiting there was busy conversation: they spoke of the man-wolf, of phantoms, and also of betrothals, for the rumor was spread that the bans of Matheline-du Coët-Dor, the promised bride of Sylvestre Ker, with the strong Pol Bihan, who had never found a rival in the wrestling-field, would be published on the following Sunday; and I leave you to imagine how Matheline's laughter ran in pearly cascades when congratulated on her approaching marriage.

By the road which led up to the tower a shadow slowly descended; it was not the wolf, but a poor woman in mourning, whose head was bent upon her breast, and who held in her hand an object that shone like a mirror, and the brilliant surface of which reflected the moonbeams.

"It is Josserande Ker!" was whispered around the circle, behind the rocks, in the brambles, and under the stumps of the oaks.

"'Tis the widow of the armed keeper of the great door!"

"'Tis the mother of the wolf, Sylvestre Ker!"

"She also has come to see. . . ."

"But what has she in her hand?"

Twenty voices asked this question. Matheline, who had good eyes, and such beautiful ones, replied :

"It looks like an axe. . . . Happy am I to be rid of those two, the mother and son! With them I could never laugh."

But there were two or three good souls who said in low tones :

"Poor widow! her heart must be full of sorrow."

"But what does she want with that axe?"

"It is to defend her wolf," again replied Matheline, who carried a pitchfork.

Pol Bihan held an enormous holy stick which resembled a club. Every one was armed either with threshing flails or rakes or hoes; some even bore scythes, carried upright; for they had not only come to look on, but to make an end of the man-wolf.

Again was heard the chime of the *Matin*-bells of the convent of Ruiz, and immediately a smothered cry ran from group to group :

"Wolf! wolf! wolf!"

Josserande heard it, for she paused in her descent and cast an anxious look around; but, seeing no one, she raised her eyes to heaven, and clasped her hands over the handle of her axe.

The wolf, in the meantime, with fuming nostrils and eyes which looked like burning coals, leaped over the stones of the enclosure and began to run around the circle.

"See, see!" said Pol Bihan, "he no longer limps."

And Matheline, dazzled by the red light from his eyes, added: "It seems he is no longer one-eyed!"

Pol brandished his club and continued:

"What are we waiting for? Why not attack him?"

"Go you first," said the men.

"I caught cold the other day, and my leg is stiff, which keeps me from running," answered Pol.

"Then I will go first!" cried Matheline, raising her pitch-fork. "I will soon show how I hate the wretch!"

Dame Josserande heard her and sighed:

"Girl, whom I blessed in baptism, may God keep me from cursing you now!"

This Matheline, whose pearls were worth nothing, was no coward; for she carried out her words, and marched straight up to the wolf, while Bihan stayed behind and cried:

"Go, go, my friends; don't be afraid! Ah! but for my stiff leg I would soon finish the wolf, for I am the strongest and bravest."

Round and round the circle galloped the wolf as quickly as a hunted stag; his eyes darted fire, his tongue was hanging from his mouth. Josserande, seeing the danger that threatened him, wept and cried out:

"O Bretons! is there among you all not one kind soul to defend the widow's son in the hour when he bitterly expiates his sin?"

"Let us alone, godmother," boldly replied Matheline.

And from afar Pol Bihan added:

"Don't listen to the old woman; go!"

But another voice was heard in answer to Dame Josserande's appeal, and it said:

"As last night, we are here!"

Standing in front of Matheline, and barring the passage, were two ragged beggars with their wallets, leaning upon their staffs. Josserande recognized the two poor men who had so charitably aided her the night before; and one of them,

who had snow-white hair and beard, said :

"Christians, my brethren, why do you interfere in this? God rewards and punishes. This poor man-wolf is not a damned soul, but one expiating a great crime. Leave justice to God, if you do not wish some great misfortune to happen to you."

And Josserande, who was kneeling down, said imploringly :

"Listen, listen to the saint!"

But from behind Pol Bihan cried out :

"Since when have beggars been allowed to preach sermons? Ah! if it were not for my stiff leg. . . . Kill him, kill him! . . . wolf! wolf! wolf!"

"Wolf! wolf!" repeated Matheline, who tried to drive off the old beggar with her pitch-fork.

But the fork broke like glass in her hands, as it touched the poor man's tatters, and at the same time twenty voices cried :

"The wolf! the wolf! Where has the wolf gone?"

Soon was seen where the wolf had gone. A black mass dashed through the crowd, and Pol Bihan uttered a horrible cry :

"Help! help! Matheline!"

You have often heard the noise made by a dog when crunching a bone. This was the noise they heard, but louder, as though there were many dogs crunching many bones. And a strange voice, like the growling of a wolf, said :

"The strength of a man is a dainty morsel for a wolf to eat. Bihan, traitor, I eat your strength!"

The black mass again bounded through the terrified crowd, his bloody tongue hanging from his mouth, his eyes darting fire.

This time it was from Matheline that a scream still more horrible

than that of Pol's was heard; and again there was the noise of another terrible feast, and the voice of the wild beast, which had already spoken, growled :

"The pearls of a smile make a dainty morsel for a wolf to eat. Matheline, serpent that stung my heart, seek for your beauty. I have eaten it!"

XIII.

The white-haired beggar had endeavored to protect Matheline against the wolf, but he was very old, and his limbs would not move as quickly as his heart. He only succeeded in throwing down the wolf. It fell at Josserande's feet and licked her knees, uttering doleful moans. But the people, who had come thither for entertainment, were not well pleased with what had happened. There was now abundance of light, as men with torches had arrived from the abbey in search of their holy saint, Gildas the Wise, whose cell had been found empty at the hour of Compline.

The glare from the torches shone upon two hideous wounds made by the wolf, who had devoured Matheline's beauty and Pol's strength—that is to say, the face of the one and the arms of the other : flesh and bones. It was frightful to behold. The women wept while looking at the repulsive, bleeding mass which had been Matheline's smiling face; the men sought in the double bloody gaps some traces of Pol's arms, for the powerful muscles, the glory of the athletic games; and every heart was filled with wrath.

The legend says that the tenant of Coat-Dor, Matheline's poor father, knelt beside his daughter and

felt around in the blood for the scattered pearls, which were now as red as holly-berries.

"Alas!" said he, "of these dead stained things, which when living were so beautiful, which were admired and envied and loved, I was so proud and happy."

Alas! indeed, alas! Perhaps it was not the girl's fault that her heart was no larger than a little bird's; and yet for this defect was not Matheline most cruelly punished?

"Death to the wolf! death to the wolf! death to the wolf!"

From all sides was this cry heard, and brandishing pitchforks, cudgels, ploughshares, and mallets, came rushing the people toward the wolf, who still lay panting, with open jaws and pendent tongue, at the feet of Dame Josserande. Around them the torch-bearers formed a circle: not to throw light upon the wolf and Dame Josserande, but to render homage to the white-haired beggar, in whom, as though the scales had suddenly fallen from their eyes, every one recognized the Grand-Abbot of Ruiz, Gildas the Wise.

The grand abbot raised his hand, and the armed crowd's eager advance was checked, as if their feet had been nailed to the ground. Calmly he surveyed them, blessed them, and said:

"Christians, the wolf did wrong to punish, for chastisement belongs to God alone; therefore the wolf's fault should not be punished by you. In whom resides the power of God? In the holy authority of fathers and mothers. So here is my penitent Josserande, who will rightfully judge the wolf and punish him, since she is his mother."

When Gildas the Wise ceased

speaking you could have heard a mouse run across the heath. Each one thought to himself: "So the wolf is really Sylvestre Ker." But not a word was uttered, and all looked at Dame Josserande's axe, which glistened in the moonlight.

Josserande made the sign of the cross—ah! poor mother, very slowly, for her heart sank within her—and she murmured:

"My beloved one, my beloved one, whom I have borne in my arms and nourished with my milk—ah! me, can the Lord God inflict this cruel martyrdom upon me?"

No one replied, not even Gildas the Wise, who silently adjured the All-Powerful, and recalled to him the sacrifice of Abraham.

Josserande raised her axe, but she had the misfortune to look at the wolf, who fixed his eyes, full of tears, upon her, and the axe fell from her hands.

It was the wolf who picked it up, and when he gave it back to her he said: "I weep for you, my mother."

"Strike!" cried the crowd, for what remained of Pol and Matheline uttered terrible groans. "Strike! strike!"

While Josserande again seized her axe the grand abbot had time to say:

"Do not complain, you two unhappy ones, for your suffering here below changes your hell into purgatory."

Three times Josserande raised the axe, three times she let it fall without striking; but at last she said in a hoarse tone that sounded like a death-rattle: "I have great faith in the good God!" and then, says the legend, she struck boldly, for the wolf's head split in two halves.

A sudden wind extinguished the torches, and some one prevented Dame Josserande from falling, as she sank fainting to the ground, by supporting her in his arms. By the light of the halo which shone around the blessed head of Gildas the Wise, the good people saw that this somebody was the young tenant, Sylvestre Ker, no longer lame nor one-eyed, but with two straight legs and two perfect eyes.

At the same time there were heard voices in the clouds chanting the *Te Deum*. Why? Because heaven and earth quivered with emotion at witnessing this supreme act of faith soaring from the depth of anguish in a mother's heart.

This is the legend that for many centuries has been related at Christmas time on the shores of the Petite-Mer, which in the Breton tongue is called *Armor bihan*, the Celtic name of Brittany.

If you ask what moral these good people draw from this strange story,

I will answer that it contains a basketful. Pol and Matheline, condemned to walk around the Basin of the Pagans until the end of time, one without arms, the other without a face, offer a severe lesson to those fellows who are too proud of their broad shoulders and brute force, and gossiping flirts of girls with smiling faces and wicked hearts; the case of Sylvestre Ker teaches young men not to listen to the demon of money; the blow of Josserande's axe shows the miraculous power of faith; the part of Gildas the Wise proves that it is well to consult the saints.

Still further, that you may bind together these diverse morals in one, here is a proverb which is current in the province: "Never stoop to pick up the pearls of a smile." After this ask me no more.

As to the authenticity of the story, I have already said that the chestnut-grove belongs to the mayor's nephew, which is one guaranty; and I will add that the spot is called Sylvestreker, and that the ruins, hung with moss, have no other name than "The Wolf-Tower!"

YULE RAPS.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

WE once saw a picture of a wide, undulating snow-landscape, over-spread with a pale rosy tint from the west, and we thought it a fancy picture of an Arctic winter. It hung in a pretty room in a Silesian country-house. The weather was lovely, warm but temperate; it was mid-June, and the woods were full of wild strawberries, and the meadows of forget-me-nots. Yet that landscape was simply Silesia in the winter; the same place, six months later, becomes a wilderness of snow. What shall we say of Mecklenburg, then, so much farther to the north of Silesia? But even there winter brings merriment; and as in these snow-bound countries there is less work to be got through in the winter, their people associate the ideas of pleasure and holiday with the cold rather than the warm weather. In Mecklenburg spring, summer, and autumn mean work—ploughing, sowing, haying, harvesting; winter means fun and frolic, peasants' dances, farmers' parties, weddings, christenings, harvest-homes, Christmas, New Year's, and Epiphany presents, gatherings of friends, fireside talk, innocent games, and general merriment.

In a little village in this province the house of Emanuel Köhler was famous for its jollity. Here were old customs well kept up, yet always with decorum and a regard to higher matters. Emanuel was virtually master of the estate of Stel-hagen, the absentee owner of which was a gay young officer who never

wrote to his agent, except for a new supply of money. Clever and enlightened an agriculturist as old Köhler was, it was sometimes difficult for him to send the required sums, and yet have enough to farm the estate to his satisfaction. In the language of the country, he was called the inspector, and his house, also according to the local custom, was a kind of informal agricultural school. At the time of our story he had four young men under him—who were in all respects like the apprentices of the good old time—and two of his own relatives, his son and his nephew. His only daughter was busy helping her mother, and learning to be as efficient a housekeeper as the young men to be first-rate farmers; and this nucleus of young society, added to the good Köhler's hearty joviality and the known good-cheer always provided by Frau Köhler, naturally made the large, cosey, rambling house a pleasant rendezvous for the neighborhood. The Köhler household was a host in itself, yet it always loved to be reinforced on festive occasions by the good people of the village and farms within ten miles round. So also the children, whether poor or pretty well off, were all welcome at old Emanuel's, and knew the way to the Frau Inspector's pantry as well as they knew the path to the church or the school. All the servant-girls in the neighborhood wanted to get a place in this house, but there was scarcely ever a vacancy, unless one of the

dairy-maids or the house-girls married. Frau Köhler and her daughter did all the kitchen work themselves, and the latter, a thoughtful girl, though she was only fifteen, studied books and maps between-whiles. But her studies never interfered with the more necessary knowledge that a girl should have when, as Rika,* she has to depend upon herself for everything. In the country, in the Mecklenburg of even a very few years ago, everything was home-made, and a supply of things from the large town twenty or thirty miles off was the event of a life-time. Such things came as wedding-gifts; and though fancy things came every Christmas, even they were carefully and sacredly kept as tokens of that miraculous, strange, bewildering world outside, in which people wore their silk dresses every day, and bought everything they wanted at large shops a few steps from their own houses. Frau Köhler often wondered what other women did who had no farm-house to manage, no spinning, or knitting, or cooking, or dairy-work to do; and when her daughter Rika suggested that they probably read and studied, she shrugged her shoulders and said: "Take care, child; women ought to attend to women's work. Studying is a man's business."

The honest soul was a type of many an old-fashioned German house-mother, of whose wisdom it were well that some of our contemporaries could avail themselves; and when Rika gently reminded her of the story of Martha and Mary, she would energetically reply:

"Very well; but take my word for it, child, there was a woman more blessed than *that* Mary, and

one who was nearer yet to her Lord; and we do not hear of *her* neglecting her house. I love to think of that house at Nazareth as just a model of household cleanliness and comfort. You know, otherwise, it could not have been a fitting place for *Him*; for though he chose poverty, he must needs have surrounded himself with spotless purity."

And Rika, as humble and docile as she was thoughtful, saw in this reverent and practical surmise a proof that it is not learning that comes nearest to the heart of truth, but that clearer and directer knowledge which God gives to "babes and sucklings."

This particular Christmas there was much preparation for the family festival. The kitchen was in a ferment for a week, and mighty bakings took place; gingerbread and cake were made, and various confectionery-work was done; for Frau Köhler expected a friend of her own early home to come and stay with her this last week of the year. This was the good old priest who had baptized her daughter; for neither mother nor daughter were natives of Mecklenburg, though the latter had grown up there, and had never, since she was six months old, gone beyond the limits of the large estate which her father administered. Frau Köhler was a Bavarian by birth, and had grieved very much when her Mecklenburg husband had taken her to this northern land, where his position and wages were so good as to make it his duty to abide and bring up his family. But the worthy old creature had done a wonderful deal of good since she had been there, and kept up her faith as steadfastly as ever she had at home. Frederika had been her treasure and her comfort; and between the mother's intense, mediæval firm-

* Short for Frederika.

ness of belief, and the child's naturally deep and thoughtful nature, the little farm-maiden had grown up a rare combination of qualities, and a model for the young Catholic womanhood of our stormy times. The old priest whom Frau Köhler had looked up to before her marriage as her best friend, and whom Rika had been taught to revere from her babyhood, had been very sick, and was obliged to leave his parish for a long holiday and rest. His former parishioner was anxious that he should see Christmas kept in the old-fashioned northern style, more characteristic than the Frenchified southern manners would now allow, even in her remote native village. Civilization comes with it the pick-axe and the rule; and when young gals begin to prefer Manchester prints and French bonnets to homespun and straw hats, most of the old customs slip away from their homes.

In the staid Mecklenburg of twenty years ago, even after the temporary stir of 1848, things were pretty much as they had been for centuries, and it was Emanuel's pride that his household should be, if needful, the last stronghold of the good old usages. He heartily acquiesced in his wife's invitation to the southern guest, and resolved to have the best Christmas that had been known in the country since he had undertaken the care of the Stelhagen estate. In truth, he lived like a patriarch among his work-people; his laborers and their families were models of prosperity and content, and the children of all the neighborhood wished he were their grandfather. Indeed, he was godfather to half the village babies born during his stay there.

The sleighs of the country were the people's pride. Some were

plain and strong, because their owners were not rich enough to adorn them, but others were quite a curiosity to the visitor from the south. They partook of the same quaintness as the old yellow family coaches that took the farmers to harvest-homes and weddings before the early snows came on. Lumbering, heavy-wheeled vehicles these were, swinging on high like a cradle tied to a couple of saplings in a storm; capacious as the house-mother's apron-pockets on a baking day; seventy years old at least, barring the numerous patchings and mendings, new lining or new wheel, occasionally vouchsafed to the venerable representative of the family dignity. The sleighs were much gayer and a little less antiquated, because oftener used, and therefore oftener worn out; besides, there were fashions in sleighs even in this remote place—fashions indigenous to the population, each individual of which was capable of some invention when sleighs were in question. On Christmas Eve, long before it grew dark, many of these pretty or curious conveyances clattered up to the farmhouse door. Some were laden with children two rows deep, all wrapped in knitted jackets, blankets, coats, etc., and here and there covered with a fur cap or furred hood; for knitting in this neighborhood supplied all with warm winter wraps, even better than woven or machine-made stuffs do nowadays. There were no single sleighs, no tiny, toy-like things made to display the rich toilet of the occupant and the skill of the fast driver by her side; here all were honest family vehicles, full of rosy faces like Christmas apples; hearty men and women who at three-score were almost as young as

their grand-children on their bridal day; and young men and maidens who were not afraid to dance and move briskly in their plain, loose, home-spun and home-made clothes, nor to fall in love with German downrightness and honest, practical intentions. Most of these sleighs were red, picked out with black, or black liberally sprinkled with red; some were yellow and black, some yellow and blue, and in most the robe and cushions were of corresponding colors. Some of these robes had eagles embroidered in coarse patterns and thick wool, while others were of a pattern something like those used for bed-quilts; and some bore unmistakable witness to the thrift of the house-mother, and were skilfully pieced together out of carpet, curtain, blanket, and dress remnants, the whole bordered with some inexpensive fur. One or two sleighs bore a sort of figure-head—the head of a deer, or a fox, or a hawk—carved and let into the curling part of the front; while one party, who were gazed upon with mingled admiration and disapproval, went so far as to trail after them, for three or four feet behind the sleigh, and sweeping up the snow in their wake, a thick scarlet cloth of gorgeous appearance, but no very valuable texture. This was the doing of a young fellow who had lately been reading one or two romances of chivalry, and been much pleased with the “velvet housings of the horses, sweeping the ground as the knight rode to the king’s tournament.” His indulgent old mother and admiring sisters had but faintly remonstrated, and this was the consequence. The horses were not less bedecked than the vehicles. Silver bells hung from their har-

ness and belted their bodies in various places; shining plates of metal and knobs driven into the leather made them as gay as circus-horses; while horse-cloths of variegated pattern were rolled up under the feet of their masters, ready for use whenever they stopped on the road.

Emanuel himself had gone to the nearest town at which a stage-coach stopped, to welcome his wife’s friend and special guest, and entertained him with a flow of agricultural information and warm eulogy of the country through which they were speeding on their way home. He arrived at Stelthagen before the rush of country visitors, and was triumphantly taken through every part of the well-kept farm, while his meal was being prepared by Rika and the maids. But more than all, Frau Köhler, in her delight, actually made him “free” of the sacred, secret chamber where stood the *Christbaum*, already laden but unlighted, among its attendant tables and dishes. The old man was as innocently charmed as a seven-year-old child; it reminded him so of his own Christmas-tree in days when the simple customs of Germany were still unimpaired, and when it was the fashion to give only really useful things, with due regard to the condition and needs of the recipients.

“But at the feasts to which my people ask me now,” said he, “I see children regaled with a multitude of unwholesome, colored *boubons* in boxes that cost quite as much as the contents, and servants given cheap silks or paste jewelry, and the friends or the master and mistress themselves loaded with pretty but useless knick-knacks, gilded toys that cost a great deal and make more show than their use war-

rants. Times are sadly changed, 'Thekla, even since you were married."

"Well, Herr Pfarrer, I have had little chance, and less wish, to see the change; and up here I think we still live as Noah's sons after they came out of the ark," said good Frau Köhler, with a broad smile at her own wit. As the day wore on, she and Rika left the *Pfarrer* (*curé*) to Emanuel's care, and again busied themselves about the serious coming festivity. She flew around, as active as a fat sparrow, with a dusting-cloth under her arm, whisking off with nervous hand every speck of dust on the mantel-piece or among the few books which lay conspicuously on the table in the best room; giving her orders to the nimble maids, welcoming the families of guests, and specially petting the children. Emanuel took the men under his protection, and gave them tobacco and pipes, and talked farming to them, while his own young home-squad whispered in corners of the coming tree and supper.

At last Rika came out from the room where the mystery was going on, and, opening the door wide, let a flood of light into the dark apartment beyond. There was a regular blaze. The large tree stood on a low table, and reached nearly up to the ceiling. There were only lights, colored ribbons, and gilded walnuts hung upon it, but it quite satisfied the expectation of the good folk around it. Round the room were tables and stands of all kinds, crowded together, and barely holding all the dishes apportioned to each member of the party. The guests had secretly brought or sent their mutual presents; one family generally taking charge of its neighbor's gifts, and *vice-versa*, that

none might suspect the nature of their own. The tree, too, was a joint contribution of the several families; all had sent in tapers and nuts, and this it was that made it so full of bright things and necessitated its being so tall.

On the middle table, under the tree itself, were dishes for the Köhler household, each one having a liberal allowance of apples, nuts, and gingerbread. Besides these, there were parcels, securely tied, laid by the dishes, and labelled with the names of their unconscious owners. Köhler was seized upon by his wife and daughter before any one else was allowed to go forward—for in this old-fashioned neighborhood the head of the house is still considered in the light of an Abraham—and a compact parcel was put into his hands by Rika, while 'Thekla kissed him with hearty loudness. Next came the guest, whom Rika led to the prettiest china dish, and presented with a small, tempting-looking packet. Leaving him to open it at his leisure, she joined her young friends, and a good-natured scramble now began, each looking for his own name in some familiar handwriting, finding it, and opening the treasure with the eagerness of a child. It would be impossible to describe every present that thus came to view; but though many were pretty and elaborate, none were for mere show. Presently Frau Köhler was seen to take possession of her husband, and, pulling off his coat, made him try on the dressing-gown he had just drawn from his parcel. She turned him round like a doll, and clapped her hands in admiration at the perfect fit; then danced around to the other end of the room, and called out to the maids:

"Lina! Bettchen! it is your

turn now; you have not been forgotten. Those are your dishes where the silver dollars are sticking in the apples." The maids opened their parcels, and each found a bright, soft, warm dress, crimson and black. Then came George, the man who did most of the immediate work round the house, and found a bright red vest with steel buttons in his parcel. Frau Kohler was busy looking at other people's things, when her husband slipped a neat, long packet on her dish, and, as she turned and saw the addition, she uttered an exclamation of joy. Rika helped her to unfold the stiff, rustling thing, when it turned out to be a black silk dress. Not every housewife in those days had one, and her last was nearly worn out. Then the old priest came forward to show the company his Christmas box; and what do you think it was? There was no doubt as to where it came from. It was a set of missal-markers, and in such taste as was scarcely to be expected in that time and neighborhood. Rika had designed it, and her mother had worked it; but many an anxious debate had there been over it, as the Frau Inspectorin had been at first quite vexed at what she called its plainness. It was composed of five thick *gros-grain* ribbons, two inches wide and fifteen long. There was a red, a green, a white, a purple, and a black ribbon; and on each was embroidered a motto—on the red and green, in gold; on the white, in red; and on the black and purple, in silver. The letters were German, though the mottoes were in Latin, and each of the five referred to one of these events: our Lord's birth, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and the Coming of the Holy Ghost. At the end

of each ribbon, instead of fringe or tassels, hung a cross of pure silver, into the ring of which the ribbon was loosely gathered. Every one crowded round this novel Christmas gift, and examined it with an admiration equally gratifying to the giver and the receiver. But Emanuel's jolly voice soon broke the spell by saying:

"These fine presents are very delightful to receive, no doubt, and the women-folk would not have been happy without some such thing; but we are all mortal, and I have not forgotten that my guest has feet and hands, and needs warmth and comfort as much as we of grosser clay."

And with this he thrust a large parcel into the *Pfarrer's* arms. Every one laughed and helped him to open it; every one was curious to see its contents. They were, indeed, of a most substantial and useful kind: a foot-muff of scarlet cloth, lined and bordered with fur, and a pair of huge sealskin gloves.

Scarcely had the parcel been opened when a hum of measured sound was heard outside, and presently a Christmas carol was distinctly audible. Everyone knew the words, and many joined in the song before the singers became visible. Then the door opened, and a troop of children came in, dressed in warm white furs and woollen wrappings, and carrying tapers and fir-branches in their hands. They sang a second carol, quaint and rustic in its words, but skilfully set to anything but archaic music, and then, in honor of their southern guest, they began *the* song of the evening, a few stanzas from the "Great Hymn" to the Blessed Virgin, by the Minnesinger, Gottfried of Strasburg, the translation of which, according to Kroegei, runs thus:

"God thee hath clothed with raiments seven ;
On thy pure body, drawn from heaven,
Hath put them even
When thou wast first created.
The first one Chastity is named ;
The second is as Virtue famed ;
The third is claimed
As Courtesy, well mated ;
The fourth dress is Humility ;
The fifth is known as Pity ;
The sixth one, Faith, clings close to thee ;
The seventh, noble Modesty,
Leads gratefully
Thee in the path of duty.

XXVII

"Thou sun, thou moon, thou star so fair,
God took thee from his own side there,
Here to prepare
The birth of Christ within thee.
For that his loved Child and thine,
Which is our life and life's sunshine,
Our bread and wine,
To stay chaste, he did win thee ;
So that sin's thorns could never touch
Thy fruitful virtue's branches.
His burning love for thee did vouch,
He kept thee from all sins that crouch :
A golden couch,
Secured by his love's trenches.

XLVII.

"Rejoice now, thou salvation's throne,
That thou gavest birth to Him who won
Our cause, thy Son,
Our Saviour and our blessing.

XLVIII.

"Rejoice now, O thou sunshine mild,
That on thy blessed breasts there smiled
God's little child—
Its earthly destination
Rejoice that then drew near to thee
From foreign lands the wise kings three,
Noble and free,
To bring their adoration
To thee and to that blessed Child,
With many a graceful off'ring.
Rejoice now, that the star beguiled
And to that place their pathway smiled
Where, with thy Child,
They worshipped thy sweet suff'ring."

"You are not so utterly unknowing of all gentle and learned pursuits as you would have had me believe," said the *Pfarrer* to Frau Köhler. "It is not every child in Bavaria that could sing so well this Old-World poem, so graceful in its rhyming and so devout in its allusions. Our old XIIth-century poetry, the most national—*i.e.*, peculiar to our country—is too much superseded by noisy modern rhymes or sentimental ballads copied from

foreign models. Have you any unknown scholar among your farmers and agents, who, you told me, made up a hearty but not a learned society here ?"

"Well," said Frau Köhler, "there is the school-master, Heldmann, who is always poring over old useless books, but never can have a good dinner unless his friends send it to him, poor man ! He is a bachelor, and cannot afford to have a housekeeper. And then there is one of our young gentlemen, who Köhler says is always in the clouds, and who spends all his spare time with Heldmann, while the other boys spend theirs with their pretty, rosy neighbors. By the way, Heldmann is coming to-night ; but he said he could not come till late, as he had some important business which would detain him for an hour or two."

"You forget our Rika, mother," said Emanuel, not heeding the last part of his wife's sentence ; "she is as wise as any of them, though she says so little. She knows all the old legends and poetry, and more besides, I warrant."

"Rika designed that missal-marker," said the Frau Inspector proudly (she had found out, since it had been so admired, that her daughter's instinct had guided her aright in the design).

But Rika, hearing her name mentioned, had slipped away among the white-wrapped children, and was laying their tapers and fir-branches away, preparatory to giving them cakes and fruit. This was quite a ceremony, and when they were ready Frau Köhler, handing the large dish of nuts to the *Pfarrer*, begged him to distribute them, while she took charge of the gingerbread and Rika of the apples.

It was funny to see the solemn

expectancy with which the children brought out dishes, mugs, pitchers, etc., in which to receive these Christmas gifts. Some of the girls held out their aprons, as more convenient and capacious receptacles than anything else they could lay hands on. One boy brought a large birthday cup, and another a wooden milk-bowl; another a small churn, while a fourth had carried off his father's peck-measure, and a fifth calmly handed up a corn-sack, which he evidently expected to get filled to the brim. As Frau Köhler came to one of the children, she said:

"Fritz, I saw you in the orchard last autumn stealing our apples. Now, naughty boys must not expect to get apples at Christmas if they take them at other times; so, Rika, don't give him any. He shall have one piece of gingerbread, though." A piteous disclaimer met this sentence; but the *Pfarrer* thrust a double quantity of nuts into the culprit's basket, and passed on. Then once again Frau Köhler stopped and said: "Johann, didn't I see you fighting with another boy in the churchyard two weeks ago, and told you that Santa Claus would forget you when he came to fill the stockings on Christmas night? I shall not give you any gingerbread."

"Franz knows we made it up again," whined the boy, and Franz, with a roguish look, peeped out from his place in the row and said: "Yes, we did, Frau Inspectorin"; so both got their gingerbread. At last, this distribution being over, the children, laden with their gifts, went home to their own various firesides, not without many thanks to the "stranger within the gates" and his parting reminder, as he showed them the stars:

"Look up at God's own Christmas-tree, lighted up with thousands of tapers, children, and at the smooth, white snow spread over the fields. That is the white tablecloth which he has spread for the beautiful gifts which spring, and summer, and autumn are going to bring you, all in his own good time."*

Then came another batch of visitors—the old, sick, and infirm people of the village; the spinning-women, the broom-tyers, the wooden bowl and spoon carvers, and the makers of wooden shoes; and some who could no longer work, but had been faithful and industrious in their time. They had something of the old costume on: the men wore blue yarn stockings and stout gray knee-breeches (they had left their top-boots outside; for the snow was deep and soft, and they needed them all the winter and through most of the spring); and the women had large nodding caps and black silk handkerchiefs folded across their bosoms. Each of these old people got a large loaf of plain cake and some good stout flannel; and these things, according to the local etiquette, the inspector himself delivered to them as the representative of his young master. This distribution was an old custom on the Stelhaven estate, and, though the present owner was careless enough in many things, he wished this usage to be always kept up. Even if he had not, it is not likely that as long as Köhler was inspector the old people would not have been able to rely on the customary Christmas gift. After this some bustle occurred, and two or three people went and stationed themselves outside the door

* From the German.

Presently the expectant company within were startled by a loud rap, and the door flew open, a parcel was flung in, and a voice cried out :
"Yule rap!"

This was a pair of slippers for the inspector. No one knew where they came from; no one had sent them. Yule raps are supposed to be magical, impersonal causes of tangible effects; so every one looked innocent and astonished, as became good Mecklenburgers under Christmas circumstances.

"Yule rap!" again, and the door opened a second time; a smoking-cap, embroidered with his initials, was evolved out of a cumbrous packet by one of the young apprentices, and scarcely had he put it on than another thundering knock sounded on the door.

"Yule rap!" was shouted again, and in flew a heavy package. It was a book, with illustrations of travel scenes in the East, and was directed to Rika.

"Yule rap!"

This time it was only a little square envelope, with a ticket referring Frau Kohler to another ticket up in the bureau drawer in her bed-room; but when one of the boys found it, that referred again to another ticket in the cellar; and when another boy brought this to light, it mysteriously referred her to her husband's pocket. Here, at last, the hidden thing was revealed—an embroidered collar, and a pair of large cuffs to match. Kohler had no idea what sprite had put it there, so he said.

"Yule rap!" and this time it was for the guest—a black velvet skull-cap, warm and clinging. Then came various things, all heralded by the same warning cry of "Yule rap!" and a knock at the door, generally in George's strong voice.

The two maids got the packages ready, and peeped in at the key-hole to see when it was time to vary the sensation by throwing in another present. Again, a breakfast-bell came rolling in, ringing as it bounded on, with just a few bands of soft stuff and silver paper muffling its sound. Once a large meerschau-pipe was laid gently at the threshold of the door, and one of the apprentices fetched it as carefully. Then a violin was pushed through the half-open door, and the eager face of the one for whom it was intended peeped anxiously over his neighbor's shoulder, wondering if any one else were the happy destined one, and as much surprised as delighted when he found it was himself. That violin has since been heard in many a large and populous town, and, though its owner did not become as world-known as Paganini or Sivori, he did not love his art less faithfully and exclusively. We cannot enumerate all the gifts which Yule brought round this year; but before the evening was over, a different voice cried out the magic words, "Yule rap!" and the door being slightly opened and quickly closed again, a tiny, white, silky dog stood trembling on the carpet. Rika jumped up and ran to take it in her arms; then pulling open the door, "Heir Heldmann! Heir Heldmann!" she cried. "I know it is you!"

The schoolmaster came forward, his rough face glowing with the cold through which he had just come.

"I promised you a dog, Rika," he said rather awkwardly, "but they would not let me have it till this very day, and I had no time to go for it but this evening. I kept it under my coat all the time; so it is quite warm. It is only two months old."

Rika was in ecstasies. She declared this was worth all her Christmas presents, and then rewarded Herr Heldmann by telling him how well the children had done their part, and how delightfully surprised the *Pfarrer* had been. The two men were soon in a deep conversation on subjects dear and familiar to both, and the company gradually dissolved again into little knots and groups. Many took their leave, as their homes were distant and they did not wish to be too late; but for all an informal supper was laid in the vast kitchen, and by degrees most of the good things on the table were sensibly diminished. The host's wife and daughter, and the Herr *Pfarrer*, with half a dozen others and a few children, did not leave the Christmas-tree, whose tapers were constantly attended to and replaced when necessary. Other "Christmas candles" were also lighted—tall columns of yellow wax, made on purpose for this occasion. As the household and its inmates were left to themselves, the children began asking for their accustomed treat—the stories that all children have been fond of since the world began. No land is so rich in the romance of childhood as Germany, both north and south. There everything is personified, and as an English writer lately said, wonderful histories are connected with the fir-trees in the forests, the beloved and venerated *Christbaum*. "Though it be yet summer, the child sees in fancy the beautiful *Weihnachtsbaum*, adorned with sparkling things as the Gospel is adorned with promises and hopes; rich in gifts as the three kings were rich; pointing to heaven as the angel pointed; bright as those very heavens were bright with silver-winged messengers; crowned with

gold as the Word was crowned; odorous like the frankincense; sparkling like the star; spreading forth its arms, full of peace and good-will on every side, holding out gifts and promises for all."

Weihnacht, the blessed, the hallowed, the consecrated night, is the child-paradise of Germany. That land of beautiful family festivals has given Christmas a double significance, and merged into its memories all the graceful, shadowy legends of the dead mythology of the Fatherland. The German child is reared in the midst of fairy-tales, which are only truths translated into child-language. Besides the old standard ones, every neighborhood has its own local tales, every family its own new-born additions or inventions. Every young mother, herself but a step removed from childhood, with all her tender imaginations still stirring, and her child-days lifted into greater beauty because they are but just left behind, makes new stories for her little ones, and finds in every flower a new fairy, in every brook a new voice.

And yet the old tales still charm the little ones, and the yearly coming of King Winter brings the old, worn stories round again. So Emanuel Kohler told the fairy-tale which the children had listened to every Christmas with ever-new delight, about the journey of King Winter from his kingdom at the North Pole, and how he put on his crown with tall spikes of icicles, and wrapped himself in his wide snow-mantle, which to him is as precious and as warm as ermine.

"And now," said the host, "there is some one here who can tell you a far more beautiful story than mine. Some One, greater than the Winter-King, comes too every year—a snow-Child, the white Christ whom our

ancestors, the old Norse and Teutonic warriors, leained to see and adore, where they had only seen and worshipped the God of War and the God of Thunder before. Ask him to tell you a story."

And the old, white-haired *Pfarrer* stroked the head of the child nearest to him, as the little one looked shyly up into his face, mutely endorsing Emanuel's appeal. He told them that they must already know the story of the first Christmas night, and so he would only tell them how the news that the angels told the shepherds on the hills came long centuries after to others as pure-minded as the shepherds, and by means almost as wonderful. He repeated to them from memory the words of an English prose-poet, which he said he had loved ever since he came across them, and which made the picture he best loved to talk on at Christmas-time: "That little infant frame, white as a snow-drop on the lap of winter, light almost as a snow-flake on the chill night air, smooth as the cushioned drift of snow which the wind has lightly strewn outside the walls of Bethlehem, is at this moment holding within itself, as if it were of adamantine rock, the fires of the beatific light. . . . The little white lily is blooming below the greater one; an offshoot of its stem, and a faithful copy, leaf for leaf, petal for petal, white for white, powdered with the same golden dust, meeting the morning with the same fragrance, which is like no other than their own!" *

There was a more marvellous tale than any they had heard about talking-flowers. The *Christkind* was a flower, and his blessed Mother was a flower—holy lilies

in the garden of God, blossoming rods like Aaron's, fruitful roots, stately cedars, and fruit-giving palm-trees. It was a very happy thing to know and feel all this, as we do, but many millions of men know nothing of it, and centuries ago even our forefathers in these forests knew nothing of it. "But," he continued, "there was a distant island, where men of our race lived, which did not receive the faith till long after Germany and France and Britain were Christian, and even had cathedrals and cloisters and schools in abundance. It was two hundred years after Chaulmagne, who was a Frankish, and therefore a German, sovereign, founded the Palatine schools and conferred with the learned English monk, Alcuin. This distant, pagan island was Iceland. The Norsemen there were a wild, fierce, warlike people, free from any foreign government, and just the kind of heroes that their old mythology represented them as becoming in their future, disembodied life. They had their scalds, or saga-men, their bards, who were both poets and historians, who kept up their spirit by singing wild songs about their ancestors and the battles they had won. They were all pagans, and thought the forgiveness of injuries very mean. Well, one day, the eve of Yule-tide, when it was terribly cold and cheerless, an old scald sat in his rough hut, with a flickering light before him, chanting one of his wild, heathen songs, and his daughter, a beautiful girl, sat at the plank table near him, busy with some woman's work. During an interval of his song she raised her eyes and said to him:

"'Father, there must be something beyond all that—something greater and nobler.'

* Father Faber's *Bethlehem*.

"'Why, child,' said the old man, with a kind of impatient wonder, 'why should you think so? Many things different there may be, just as there are different kinds of men, and different kinds of beasts, and different kinds of plants; some for mastery and some for thralldom; some for the chase, and some for the kitchen or the plough; some for incantations and sacrifices, and some for common food. But anything nobler than our history there could not be; and as for our religion, if there were anything different, or even better, it would not suit our people, and so would be no concern of ours.'

"'But if it were true, father, and ours not true, what then?'

"'Why ask the question, child? What was good enough for the wise and brave Northmen who fled here that they might be free to fight and worship according to their fancy, is good enough for their descendants.'

"'But you know yourself, father,' persisted the maiden, 'that those whom our poetical traditions call gods were men, heroes and patriots who taught our forefathers various arts, and guided them safely across deserts and through forests in their long, long migration—but still only men. Our chieftains of to-day might as well become gods to our great-grandchildren, if the old leaders have become so to us. Wise as they were, they could not command the frozen seas to open a way for their ships, nor make the sun rise earlier in the long winter, nor compel the cutting ice-wind to cease. If they could not do such things, they must have been very far from gods.'

"'It is true,' said the old man, 'that those great chieftains were, in the dim ages we can scarcely

count back to, men like us; but the gods who taught them those very arts took them up to live with them as long as their own heaven might last, and made them equal to themselves. You know even Paradise itself is to come to an end some day.'

"'So our legends say, father; but that, too, makes it seem as if these gods were only another order of mortal beings, stronger but not better than we are, and hiding from us the true, changeless heaven far above them. For surely that which changes cannot be divine. And then our legends say that evil is to triumph when heaven and earth come to an end. True, they say there will be a renewal of all things after that, and that, no doubt, means that good will be uppermost; very likely all the things spoken of in our Eddas are only signs of other things which we could not understand.'

"'The daughter continued these questionings and speculations, the scald answering them as best he could.

"'He had listened with evident admiration and approval to her impassioned speech, but he was willing to test her faith in her own womanhood to the utmost. She now seemed wrapt in her own thoughts, but after a short pause said :

"'It would not be another's inspiration in which I should believe; it would be a message from Him who has put this belief already into my heart. Some One greater than all has spoken to my inmost heart, and I am ready to believe; but the messenger that is to put it into words and tell me what to do has not come.'

"'There was a silence, and the wind and the sea roared without. The old man shaded the flick-

ering light with his hand, and gazed at his daughter, who was sitting with her hands clasped in her lap. He thought that she herself must have received some divine illumination; for the Norsemen believed in the prophetic gifts of some of their women. His own mind, more cultivated than that of the warrior's, saw through the symbolic character of many of the very myths he sang, and tended vaguely to belief in a higher and hidden circle of things infinite, true, and eternal. But then the northern mind was naturally simple, not prone to metaphysical distinctions, not analytical and subtle, dividing as with the sword that pierceth between soul and spirit; and the old man saw no use in raising theological problems for which he could offer no rational solution, save through the dreams of a young girl. Presently the old man rose, shaking off his meditations, and said:

“It is time for me to go to the Yule-night festival, and I shall have a stormy trudge of it to the castle. I must leave you alone here till to-morrow night. But, my child, I know that there is safety for the scald's daughter wherever she may be; the very sea would not hurt her, and the wildest men would kneel before her; so farewell, and a father's blessing be upon you.”

“His daughter rose and fetched his cloak and staff, wrapped the former around him, and fastened it over the rude musical instrument that answered the purpose of lyre and harp; but I am not very learned in such things, and cannot tell you exactly what it was. The young girl stood long on the threshold of the hut, shading the light, and looking out after her father into the darkness. The wind was

sharp and icy, and blew from the frozen sea. As she held the light, she thought she heard a cry come from the direction of the sea. She lingered before closing the door, although the wind was very chill; for the cry seemed repeated, and she thought it was a human voice calling. A moment's reflection told her it could not be so; for the whole sea was frozen for miles outward, and no boat or wreck could come so near land. She sat down again to her work, and mused on the conversation she had held with her father. He had studied then national books all his life, and she was not yet twenty. He must know best. Was she likely to be right? She had little experience of the way in which the old system worked; only her own dreams and fancies showed her any other possibility, and yet—she could not shake off the thought: she thirsted for another revelation. The far-off, unknown God-head must have some means of communicating with men; why should he not speak to her, who so passionately and blindly longed for a message, a command, from him?

“The cry from the sea sounded again. Surely, this time there could be no mistake; the voice was human, and it had come nearer since she had left the door. She took up the light again, and went outside, shouting as loud as she could in return. She was answered, and a strange awe came upon her as she heard this cry. Was it that of a man or a spirit? The latter supposition seemed to her unsophisticated mind quite as likely as the former, but it did not frighten her, as it would most of her countrywomen. She went in again, wrapped a thick fur cloak around her, and, taking another on her arm,

sallied out once more with another stronger light. It was barely possible to keep the resinous torch alight, and she looked anxiously out towards the sea, to try and catch some glimpse of a human figure. The cries came again at intervals; but she knew that in the clear air a seemingly near sound might yet be far distant. She had to walk briskly up and down the shore, in the beaten path between walls of snow, to keep herself warm, and occasionally she lifted the flaring torch and waved it as a signal. She could do no more, but she longed to see her unknown visitor, and to go out to meet him on the frozen waters. Was it some wrecked sailor, who had clambered from ice-floe to ice-floe, in the desperate hope of reaching land before he died of cold and hunger, or some unearthly messenger from an invisible world? If he were a mere man, from what coast could he have drifted. No Icelandic would be out at this time and place; it was Yuletide, and there were no wandering boats out among the ice-cliffs and floes. At last she thought she could discern a shadowy form, blacker than the surrounding darkness, but surely no human form; it was like a moving cross, one upright shape, and one laid across near the top, and both dark and compact. But the cry was repeated, though in a more assured and joyful tone, and the maiden waited with bated breath, wondering what this marvel could mean. A field of unbroken ice stretched between her and the advancing figure, which now hastened its steps, and came on like a swift-sailing bird, cleaving the darkness. She thought she could distinguish a human face above the junction of the two arms of the cross, and she held up the light, still uncertain

what kind of visitant this approaching form might be. At last it flashed upon her that it was a man bearing a child. But why so rigid? Why did he not hug him close to his bosom to keep him warm, to keep him alive? Was the child dead? And a shuddering awe came upon her, as she thought of its dead white face upturned to heaven, and of the faithful man who had not forsaken it, or left it to the seals and wolves on the ice, or buried it in the chill waters beneath the ice-floes. What a cold it must have struck to the heart of the man carrying it; how his hands must be well-nigh frozen in supporting this strange burden!

"She hardly knew whether she was still imagining what might be, or witnessing real movements, when the figure came straight up to her, and, stooping, laid the child at her feet. She lowered the torch, and, as the glare fell on the little face, she saw that it was no breathing one; the man had sunk down beside it, hardly able to stir, now the supreme effort was over and his end was accomplished. She dropped the cloak she held over the little body, and caught up a handful of snow, wherewith she energetically rubbed the face and hands of the stranger, then half dragged, half supported him to the door of the hut. He had only spoken once, just as he dropped at her feet, but she did not understand him: he spoke in a foreign tongue. Once more she went out and brought in the stiffened, frozen body of the child, which she laid on a fur robe just outside the hut; for it was warm within the small, confined dwelling. It was an hour before the stranger's eye told her that her simple, quick remedies had succeeded. He was not very tall, but

immensely strong and powerful, and there was a fire in his dark gray eye that gave the clew to his strange, weird pilgrimage over the ice-floes. His hair was dark brown, with a reddish tinge, but already mixed with a few gray streaks; it had been shorn close to his head some time since, as appeared from its irregular growth at present. Beneath his cloak he wore a long black robe, with a leathern girdle round the waist. The child was very beautiful, even in death; his eyes were closed, but his black, curling hair hung round his neck, and the lips had a sweet though somewhat proud outline. The scald's daughter set some simple food before her silent guest, and made him a sign to eat. He was evidently very hungry, but before he began he moved his lips and made the sign of the cross on his forehead, lips, and breast. She asked him in her own language what that ceremony meant, not hoping to make him understand her speech, but trusting to her inquiring looks for some explanatory sign that she might interpret as best she could to herself. To her surprise, he answered in a few, slow, labored words, not in Icelandic to be sure, but in some dialect akin to it; for she could make out the meaning. It was, in fact, the Noise dialect that was spoken in the Orkney Islands, but she did not know that. As he spoke, her guest pointed upwards, and she knew that he referred to God. A great longing came into her heart, and she asked again if his God were the same the Icelanders worshipped. He shook his head, and she eagerly questioned farther, but grew so voluble that he could not follow her, and the conversation ceased. Then the stranger rose and went

out to the little corpse, which he addressed in impassioned terms in his own language, making over it the same sign that had drawn the maiden's attention before. He then described to her—mostly in pantomime, and with a few Noise words to help him on, and a few slowly-pronounced questions on her part—how the boy and he had been in a boat that was wrecked many days' journey from their own country, and how he had carried him and fed him for three or four days, and then seen him die in his arms. The boy was the only son of a great chief, and he was taking him to his uncle in the North of Scotland. His own country was south of Scotland, a large island like Iceland, but green and beautiful, and there was no ice there.

"The girl made him understand that she was alone for a day or two, but when her father came back he would help him. He evidently understood her better than she did him.

"The next morning, when she again set food before him, she imitated his sign of the cross, and said she wished to believe in the true God; and if his God were the true one, she would believe in him. She looked so earnest and anxious that he again began to try to explain; but the few words he could command, though they sufficed to hint at his worldly adventures, and made clear to her that he had been wrecked, were scarcely adequate to tell her of the new religion she longed to understand.

"But at noon that day another guest and traveller passed by the scald's dwelling. He was hurrying to the same castle where the girl's father had gone in his capacity of minstrel, but a violent snow-storm

had come on that morning, and he had lost his way. He stopped a moment to refresh himself, and noticed the stranger. He was himself known as a great traveller, and the figure in the coarse black robe seemed not unfamiliar to him. He addressed the stranger in the latter's language, guessing him at once to be an Irish monk. He said he had seen such men in the Scottish islands, where he had been storm-driven with his ship two years ago, and he had picked up a little of their speech. When the maiden discovered that in this stray guest she had found an interpreter, she pressed him, implored him, almost commanded him, to stay.

"I must ask him the questions my father could not solve yesterday," she said; "and my father's friend will not refuse to speak in my name, for I believe that the unknown God has answered my prayer in sending this holy man over the sea to my very feet." And she told him how the stranger had come to her, out of the darkness, in the shape of a cross—the same sign he made to propitiate his God.

"Ask him to tell us what he believes," she said impetuously; and the interpreter, compelled by some instinct that he could not resist, began his office willingly.

"Tell him," she said, "that yesterday, before he came, I was all day thinking that the high, true, unknown God had a message for me, and a truer faith to teach me, because he had put into my heart a longing for something higher than what our books and songs have taught us. And tell him that I believe God sent him in answer to my doubts and prayers."

"The traveller faithfully translated all this. The monk's face

glowed as he replied, in his own language, which he used with the grace and skill of a poet:

"Tell the maiden that she is right; the true God *did* send me, and now I know why such things happened to me; why I was wrecked with my lord's only son, a precious freight, a sacred deposit, which the Lord of lords has now taken upon himself to account for to the earthly father, bereaved of his one hope. But God sent me here because to this pure-hearted virgin I was to explain the faith he had already put into her heart. It is not I who bring her the true faith, but God himself who has spoken to her and inclined her to believe; me he has sent to put this message into practical form. Tell her that this is the birthday of the Lord, and that a thousand years ago, almost at the same hour when I set my dead burden at her feet, a living Child, God's own Child, lay at the feet of a pure Virgin in a little village far away in the land of the rising sun. And as this maiden's torch which I saw over the wild, frozen sea, and followed, was an emblem of the faith that dwelt already in her heart, so, too, a marvellous star led three wise men, the scalds of the East, to where this Child lay, and the star was the emblem of their firm faith, which led them to cross rivers and deserts to reach the Child. And tell her that the way in which this wonderful birth was celebrated was by a song which held all the essence of truth in it. 'Glory to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good-will.'"

"All this the interpreter told the maiden, and both marvelled at it. The stranger told them more and more of that wonderful tale, so familiar to us, but which once sounded to our warlike forefathers like

the foolishness of babes and sucklings, or at most like some Eastern myth good enough for philosophers to wrangle over, but unfit for sturdy men of the forest. To the Icelandic maiden it seemed but the fulfilment of her own dreams; and as she listened to the story of the Child, grown to be a wise but obedient Boy, and then a wandering, suffering Man, her soul seemed to drink in the hidden grandeur of the relation, to pierce beyond the human stumbling-blocks which confronted the wise and learned of other lands, and go at once to the heart of the great mystery of love, personified in the Man-God. All the rest seemed to her to be the fitting garment of the central mystery, the crown of leaves growing from the fruitful trunk of this one doctrine. All day long the three sat together, the two Icelanders hanging on the words of the stranger; and so the scald found them on his return. He, too, wanted to know the news which the monk had brought; for he said he had always believed that behind their national songs and hymns lay something greater, but perhaps not expedient for Norsemen to know. He shook his head sadly when he learned the monk's precepts of love, peace, mercy, and forgiveness, and said he feared his countrymen would not understand that, but for his part it was not uncongenial to him. As the weather was such that no vessel could put to sea before the ice broke up, he constrained the monk to stay the rest of the winter with him, and in the spring promised to go over with him to the nearest Scottish coast, and carry the body of his little charge to the uncle to whom he had been on his way when he was wrecked.

"Before the New Year began,

the monk baptized the first Icelandic convert, the daughter of the scald, and gave her the name of the Mother of the Babe of Bethlehem, Mary. Many others heard of the new religion before he left, but that does not belong to my story. The new convert and her father accompanied him to Scotland, and were present at the burial of the Irish chieftain's son at the castle of his Scottish uncle. The latter's son married the Norse maiden, but she never ceased to lament that it had not been given to her to convert many of her own countrymen, or at least shed her blood for her new faith. All her life long she helped to send missionaries to Iceland; and when her son grew up to manhood, the palm she coveted was awarded to him, for he went to his mother's native country, founded a monastery there, labored among the people, converted many, and taught reading and the arts of peace as well as the faith to his pupils; became abbot of the monastery, and was finally martyred on the steps of the altar by a horde of savage heathen Norsemen.

"This is the best Christmas story I know, children," concluded the Herr Pfarrer; "and you, Rika, I can wish you no better model than the fair maiden of Iceland."

It was nearly midnight when the old priest finished his tale, and Frau Köhler, rising, and thanking him cordially for this unwonted addition to ordinary Christmas stories, led him to a door which had been locked till now. It opened into a room decked as a chapel, with an altar at the end, which was now decorated with evergreens. A few chairs and benches were ranged before it, and on a table at the side was everything in readiness for saying Mass.

"It is long since I have heard a midnight Mass," said the good hostess, growing suddenly grave and reverential in her manner, "and my Rika never has; and you know, Herr Pfarrer, I told you I had a greater surprise in store for you yet, after all the local customs in which you were so much interested."

So the beautiful Midnight Mass was said in the Mecklenburg inspector's farm-house, and a more impressive one Frau Kohler had never heard in any southern cathedral; for though there was no music and no pomp, there brooded over the little congregation a spirit of reverence and peace, which comes in full perfection only through a deep silence. The hostess and her daughter received Communion together, and the attentive household could not help thinking of the beautiful

Icelandic convert when she came back from the altar, her hands folded over her breast, and her long, fair hair plaited in two plain, thick tresses.

Heir Heldmann had stayed too, and from that day he never ceased his study of theological problems and his correspondence with the Herr Pfarrer, till he became a Catholic, and was married to Rika in this same little chapel-room a year later by the same kind old priest. One of the young apprentices of Emanuel Köhler had been his secret rival; but notwithstanding that Heldmann was ungainly, shy, and twice her age, Rika decidedly thought that she had the best of the bargain.

And it was true; he had a heart of gold, and she made him a model wife.